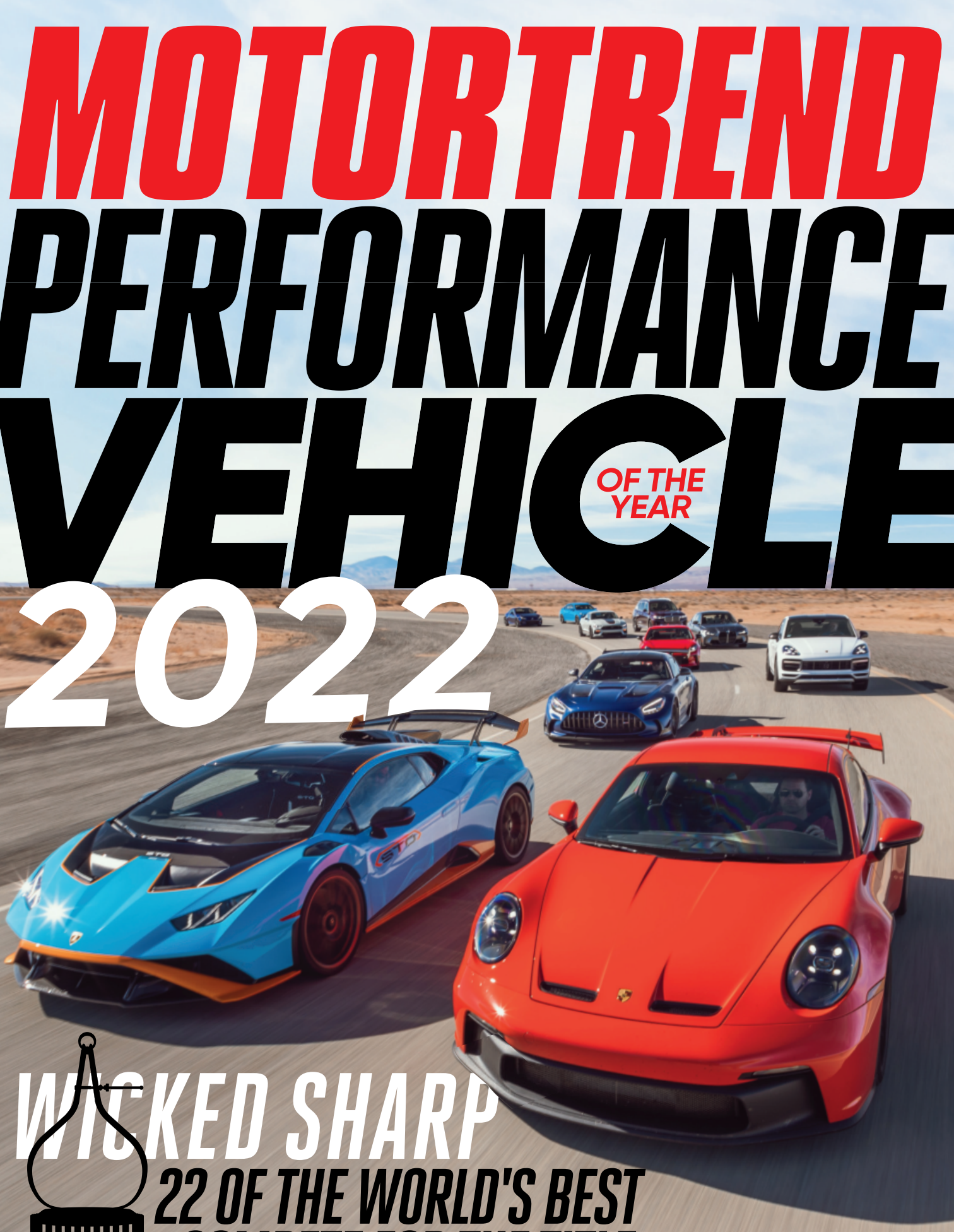
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COVER STORY

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Twenty-two of the world's hottest performance cars gathered for the right to claim a new crown. And we're just getting started.

EST. 1949
VOL. 74 NO. 4

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ON THE COVER
The Performance Vehicle of the Year breaks new ground by mastering the old. Photo: Renz Dimaandal



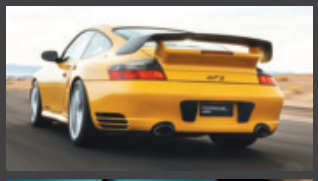
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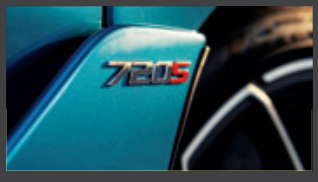
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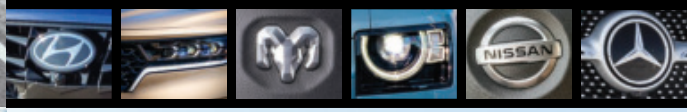








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Ed Loh
Head of Editorial

Editor's Note



PVOTY AS ONE DOOR CLOSES, SO OPENS ANOTHER.

Welcome to our inaugural Performance Vehicle of the Year (PVOTY) issue. A quick history: We've awarded our Car of the Year title since 1949. In 1978, we added Truck of the Year and then SUV of the Year in 1999. Alongside Person of the Year, these have been our automotive Of The Year awards for decades. Until now.

Why, and why now? It's instructive to look back at *MotorTrend*'s old Import Car of the Year. First awarded in 1970, the idea of ICOTY was to finally acknowledge an indisputable truth: Cars from auto manufacturers outside of America were here to stay and should be celebrated, at least for a while. We awarded ICOTY alongside COTY until 1999, when my predecessors decided to fold the former back into the latter because shifts in automotive manufacturing and global economics challenged the notion of what constitutes foreign and domestic vehicle production. What is a car's country of origin if the engine is made in Brazil, the body panels are stamped in Canada, the transmission and wiring harness are produced in Mexico, and final assembly occurs in Michigan? Or if multiple factories around the world assemble the same vehicle? Our editorial forebears ultimately decided none of this matters and that the inherent goodness of the car, the breakthrough experience it delivers, and how history would view it were much more important.

They read the room and made the right call, which is what we are doing here with our focus on performance. I submit to you the following:

We live in a golden automotive age. Thirteen years ago we reported the horsepower wars were over. We were wrong. To twitch an eyebrow these days, you need at least 500 hp, if not four figures for tongues to really start wagging. This inflation is not just limited to hyper-expensive exotic cars. For $37,000, you can buy a Ford Mustang GT with 460 ponies. Need more vroom? Try the 505-hp Alfa Romeo Stelvio. Or if you need to move a couch, in a hurry, up a sand dune? The 702-hp Ram 1500 TRX has you covered.

These power and torque increases, along with all the fancy systems that allow their delivery, have resulted in a golden age of performance, as well. Those who monitor lap records at the vaunted Nürburgring Nordschleife know what I'm talking about. It used to be that a stock production car lapping the iconic German test track in less than 8 minutes joined an exclusive club. Now, a hot hatch like the Honda Civic Type R is quicker than that, and we see Porsches, Mercedes-AMGs, and Lamborghinis running in the 6:40 (or quicker) bracket. Our own testing bears this out; in the past two years, we've seen our 0–60 record fall twice—first to less than 3.0 seconds and then to almost less than 2.0. This is bonkers.

Megawatt advances in automotive tech are responsible for a lot of this golden-era shine. While one of the highest-horsepower production cars is still a 16-cylinder, quad-turbo, gas-burning Bugatti Chiron Super Sport, you can order our electrifying 2022 Car of the Year Lucid Air with up to 1,111 hp, or a Tesla Model S with 1,020 hp. On the truck side, the Hummer EV pickup is also available with 1,000 hp, and our 2022 Truck of the Year, the Rivian R1T, comes standard with 835 hp. Oh, and the two vehicles that broke our 0–60 record? Electric all-stars from Porsche and Tesla.



As we did in the '70s, we're expanding the OTY scope to acknowledge a new automotive reality.

As we covered in our previous issue, we believe our electrified future is inevitable, so we're going to walk a second, parallel path with all the existing, mostly gas-burning vehicles we know and love.

Internal combustion technology has never seen higher outputs, greater efficiency, or more thrills per cubic inch than right now. But as more carmakers trumpet about going all in on EVs, we receive quietly distributed notices about their final run of internal combustion engines, starting with the burliest V-10s and V-8s. Exiting right alongside: manual transmissions.

We know some of you mourn the coming loss of dropping the clutch, mashing the gas, and ripping your right hand through six or seven gears. You loudly curse this transition; we hear you and understand. Every year, for more than a decade, we sent dozens of staffers on the road for two weeks, testing and driving the world's top sports cars in search of the Best Driver's Car. But that BDC program has run its course; PVOTY is Version 2.0, built upon the belief it's possible to be excited for the future, embracing all the broken barriers to come, while celebrating the end of an era. That is what we set out to do with our Performance Vehicle of the Year. We're applying our decades of experience and rigorous, industry-leading Of The Year framework to the realm of performance machines, whatever body style they happen to come in.

Time is short. The world is changing. So let's round up the stickiest-tired whoop machines—whether gas- or electron-powered—and smoke 'em while we got 'em (and can still drive 'em). Please enjoy the issue and our first Performance Vehicle of Year competition, along with plenty of additional high-horsepower content.



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2004 Porsche 911 GT2

REWIND REVIEW IT SURE SEEMED CRAZIER BACK IN ITS DAY.

The first 911 Turbo gave powerful Porsches, especially turbocharged ones, their reputations as widow-makers. In that car, the difference between maximum cornering speed and the engine attempting to pass the front tires is measured in fractions of a mile per hour, and by the time you realize what's happening, it's too late to do anything about the speed. Lift, and "you'll end up backward in a ditch," folks said. Instead, you work the steering wheel like an actor "driving" in front of a green screen and hope you hold it together until things straighten out, physically and emotionally.

Subsequent 964, 993, and 996 generations tamed this tendency with anti-roll bars made of steel rather than cheese, but the laws of physics always lurked. That's readily apparent from our original review of the 996-gen GT2, full of warnings to watch out for its vicious side despite assurances it "doesn't do anything other than what it's told to do" and "has no inherent bad habits but will identify and exaggerate yours."

You can imagine some trepidation today, then, climbing into a 2004 Porsche 911 GT2 fresh from Porsche's museum collection and pointing onto a racetrack. After all, this is a car that didn't adhere to anyone else's rules. The 993 GT2 was built for homologation reasons, but by the 996's arrival, priorities had shifted to the GT3 class and birthed Porsche's namesake naturally aspirated sensation, leaving GT2 engineers to do whatever the hell they wanted.

What they wanted, naturally, was more power. It had 477 hp by the end of production, an additional 62 over the contemporary 911 Turbo. But the folks in Weissach desired ultimate performance, so the 2004 GT2 is 220 pounds lighter after ditching unnecessary things such as rear seats.



The real party trick, though, is the set of racing-derived carbon-ceramic brake rotors, making it the first production car fitted with the original PCCB (Porsche Ceramic Composite Brakes) system. It wowed us at the time with its ability to stop from 60 mph in 107 feet, the same distance required by a 2022 Subaru BRZ. Yet carbon brakes are more about consistency and eliminating brake fade; that's what really impressed us.



Like generations of Porsche engineers before, the GT2 team ignored the implications of putting the cart before the horse and instead focused on making a more powerful horse.



Traction control? No. Stability control? Also no. But hey, it has ABS! The rest is up to you. Try not to put it backward into a ditch.

But we were so obsessed with the GT2's incredible acceleration, we didn't spend much time discussing the brake type that would become ubiquitous on supercars industry wide. We praised the rock-hard brake pedal because it required you to modulate stopping power with leg strength, not extension. The latter observation was correct, but it was also a product of the time when brake pedals were squishy, because resistance and modulation aren't necessarily correlated.

Today, the GT2's brake pedal is firm, but not nearly as much as we made it sound all those years ago. Yes, it's modulated by effort, but there's enough travel to fine-tune your deceleration. Even after a dozen laps of the Streets of Willow, the brakes' bite remained as strong as the first stop.

Similarly, the GT2's "lower-boost power steering" was listed among its performance attributes, which may have made sense to those who learned to drive without power assistance. Today, the steering is just heavy, making you work harder to hustle the car around a tight, technical circuit like Streets. Nearly two decades removed from the hairshirty "good sports cars should try to kill you" nostalgia fostered by people whose first cars didn't have airbags, we now prefer lighter steering that makes it easier to change direction as precisely as possible.

The 2004 911 GT2's clutch is heavy no matter the decade. Combined with the weighty steering, it makes leaving an increasing-radius right-hander a dicey proposition. You must move your left hand down the wheel so you have plenty of leverage when you move your right hand to shift just after the apex, when there's still a fair amount of steering lock applied.

Unlike older 911s, the shifter is precise enough that you can throw it in the direction of the gear you want and get into the gate without trying too hard. Compared to a modern Porsche, the throws are long and loose, but hell, the 2021 BMW M4 (see page 50) wishes it had a shifter this good.

Then there's the twin-turbo flat-six engine the whole mess is connected to, the supposed doombringer out back. The '02 model's 3.8-second 0–60 run remains impressive today, and it was brain-melting 20 years ago. A 2002 Ferrari 360 Modena needed 4.5 seconds, and a V-12 Lamborghini Murciélago of the same year was only 0.3 second quicker than the Porsche.



2004 Porsche 911 GT2

BASE PRICE	$191,700 (in 2003-2004)
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Rear-engine, RWD, 2-pass, 2-door coupe
ENGINE	3.6L/477-hp/472-lb-ft twin-turbo port-injected DOHC 24-valve flat-6
TRANSMISSION	6-speed manual
CURB WEIGHT (DIST F/R)	3,175 lb (38/62%)
WHEELBASE	92.7 in
L X W X H	175.2 x 72.0 x 50.2 in
0-60 MPH	3.8 sec
EPA CITY/HWY/ COMB FUEL ECON	14/22/16 mpg
EPA RANGE (COMB)	270 miles
ON SALE IN U.S.	2003-2004

The 911 GT2 is still quick, but not until it's really on the boost. The throttle's relative responsiveness off-boost was probably pretty good by 2004 standards, but the turbo lag is hilarious today. Back then, we warned about not standing on the gas exiting a corner at less than 3,000 rpm, lest the swell of power blow the rear tires off. Now? We can't imagine why you'd let the revs get that low in the first place. Sure, it's thrilling to feel the surge when the turbos join the party, but a halfway decent lap requires keeping the revs high. Doing so isn't difficult; the pedals are spaced perfectly for heel-toe downshifts, so you just need to muscle the brake and clutch to make it all happen.

What about the "you'll end up backward in a ditch" hand-wringing? Don't worry much about it. The 2004 GT2 has a lot of grip by any measure, so you have to really try to get it to step out. And if you don't know better than to try by now, you shouldn't be driving a vintage Porsche. Even on a track with just the right kind of bend to trigger a scary slide, the GT2 feels planted, and you don't mind that it lacks traction and stability control. It's not an evil car that lulls you into a false sense of security; it's plain about how it will respond to inputs. As we said back then, "Just be sure you tell it the right things."

If anything, the sense the GT2 is taxing to drive is due to its heavy primary controls. It doesn't dance delicately through corners like a modern 911; you must put it there with some effort and by driving the way it demands. It listens to no rules but its own, but when you comply, this classic GT2 remains incredibly satisfying. **Scott Evans**









Intake

2022 Subaru WRX

Big shoes to fill.

FIRST DRIVE



Prior to driving the new 2022 Subaru WRX, I thought back to when I bought a black 2002 WRX wagon. Although the WRX had been on sale in Japan and other markets since 1992, that was the first model year we Yanks could own one. Four years later, I bought another new WRX wagon, a 2006 in World Rally Blue. So I'm a fan and former owner of the brand's previous efforts in this space. And as fate would have it, I'm in the market for a new car, so am I buying a 2022 Subaru WRX? Let's find out.

For the first time in its history, the WRX has completely unique sheetmetal. But with its wider hood scoop, fatter fender flares, and black plastic cladding, the new WRX still isn't good-looking, and here's the thing: Each new WRX is somehow uglier than the last. Then, after a few years, you either get soft or the design starts working, and it looks fine, usually when a new, more grotesque version appears. Will this happen with this WRX? Yeah, probably.

Inside, the WRX finally catches up with its Subaru lineup mates; the touchscreen on upper trims is colorful and massive, and the amount of hard plastic bits is reduced. But no one ever bought a WRX for its interior, and that will remain true of this one.

Instead, it's all about the drive and the powertrain. The new WRX adopts the turbocharged FA24F flat-four, good for 271 hp and 258 lb-ft of torque. Solid numbers, but just barely more power than the last WRX (268 hp) and identical torque—a weird strategy for a performance car, even if Subaru says the new engine's peak output shows up earlier. Main thing is, it doesn't feel any quicker.

Subaru could not have picked a better time and place to launch the new WRX. California's Sonoma and Mendocino Counties had been wracked by an "atmospheric river" of rain for two days, and the roads there were as tight, bumpy, and twisted as ever. Traditionally, WRXs love harsh weather and tortured tarmac, so it's no shocker to say the new one does, too.

In that damp environment, the 2022 WRX never so much as put a tread block out of line. There's a serious abundance of grip, and it became obvious after a few miles that this iteration is even more planted than the seriously planted previous versions. The worse the pavement, the better the WRX behaved, almost as if it were a rally car. Wink.

The steering, though improved, still lacks nuance and feel, but the ride quality takes a big step forward. A longer wheelbase helps, but the stiffer chassis and more effective suspension likely deserve the credit. A range-topping GT model with variable dampers, a WRX first, arrives later, but the regular suspension is more than acceptable.

If you liked any previous WRX, you're going to love the 2022. All the classic traits are here: It's fun to drive, it tenaciously grips the pavement, it's practical, and it offers a true performance bargain. Subaru hasn't released the pricing yet, but expect a small increase over the outgoing car's $28,420 ask. Is it all good enough to entice me to get my third WRX? Let's just say it's on the list. **Jonny Lieberman**

2022 Subaru WRX	
BASE PRICE	$29,000 (est)
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front-engine, AWD, 5-pass, 4-door sedan
ENGINE	2.4L/271-hp/258-lb-ft turbo direct-injected DOHC 16-valve flat-4
TRANSMISSIONS	6-speed manual, CVT
CURB WEIGHT	3,300-3,550 lb (mfr)
WHEELBASE	105.2 in
L X W X H	183.8 x 71.9 x 57.8 in
0-60 MPH	5.5 sec (*MT* est)
EPA CITY/HWY/ COMB FUEL ECON	19/25-26/21-22 mpg
EPA RANGE (COMB)	349-365 miles
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Intake

Lamborghini Essenza SCV12

FIRST DRIVE A $2.5 MILLION SCREAMING GOOD TIME.

Modern Lamborghini has a habit of milking its series-production cars for all they're worth to create rebodied and mechanically upgraded limited editions. So it's not terribly difficult to sometimes take a cynic's view that the company relishes finding easy ways to tap into its richest clients' hedge funds or crypto accounts rather than developing truly new machines—the type of cars we might remember as vividly as the ones on which Lamborghini made its name.

So we were thrilled to discover the Essenza SCV12 is a long way from being a rebodied and retuned production model. It's effectively a purpose-built race car, one whose point wasn't homologation for competition but rather to explore what's possible when unfettered by racing rules.

Lamborghini let us behind its F1-style wheel for 16 laps of Las Vegas Motor Speedway's 1.1-mile road course. The nine-turn circuit is more of a club track, largely taken in second or third gear, but the front straight allowed for speeds in the 140-mph ballpark before a challenging braking zone for the second-gear Turn 1 left-hander. The choice of venue and opportunity to run whatever pace we wanted was enough to demonstrate the Essenza's intriguing approachability for amateur drivers.

The starting procedure is simple but fun: Flip on the master switch, briefly let the electronics boot up, and push the ignition button followed by the start button. Once the 6.5-liter V-12 thrums to life, hold the brakes (left foot preferred), punch and hold the blue button on the steering wheel for neutral, and click the right shift paddle once to select first gear in the Xtrac six-speed sequential manual racing 'box. (There's no clutch pedal.) Foot off the brake, hit the throttle, and you're off.



You bounce around as you trundle down pit lane, typical race car behavior thanks to a limited-travel pushrod suspension that doesn't like slow driving. Kill the pit speed limiter by clicking a button on the wheel, and—*bam!*—the Essenza howls like only a naturally aspirated Italian V-12 does, noises exaggerated by its unrestricted Capristo exhaust. The engine is the same as the Aventador's, but







The F1-style steering wheel offers controls for myriad adjustments, and it also looks exotically cool.

thanks to the exhaust, a bespoke intake system, and a Motech motorsports ECU, it produces 820 hp at 8,500 rpm and 568 lb-ft at 6,000, 61 horses and 37 lb-ft more than the Aventador SVJ road car.

Within a few laps, even once we turned up the power fully—a switch on the wheel ramps up output in 25-hp increments—the nuclear straight-line speed isn't what got us. Rather, with bespoke Pirelli slicks and monster downforce, the car's grip and handling had us shaking our heads and giggling even on a slow track like this one.

We still felt the massive grip through a flat-out third-gear kink toward the end of the lap and in how late we could brake before Turn 1. Braking markers on the side of the front straight served as guides; Lambo's pro drivers at first suggested braking at the third marker from the end, working our way down to halfway to the second-from-last marker. But after a few laps, we rocked the Essenza down the front straight past the third marker, past the halfway point, and nearly all the way to the second before crushing the pedal.

The brake pedal feels softer than you might expect at first, then firms up significantly and provides immediate response and outstanding modulation. We remained easily in control as the back end wobbled before reestablishing grip through the middle of the braking zone. Finally, downshifts completed with a few satisfyingly solid clicks of the left paddle, we trailed off the pedal at the turn-in point, and the Essenza dug in, nailed the apex, and tracked out the other side with what we swear was a yawn. We're convinced we could have gone another 20 feet deeper into the braking zone—and we also weren't stupid enough to try it. But the fact we believe it after such a brief experience says a lot about how much confidence the SCV12 inspires.

Lamborghini Essenza SCV12	
BASE PRICE	$2,500,000 (est)
LAYOUT	Mid-engine, RWD, 2-pass, 2-door coupe
ENGINE	6.5L/820-hp/568-lb-ft port-injected DOHC 48-valve 60-degree V-12
TRANSMISSION	6-speed sequential manual
CURB WEIGHT	3,250 lb (est)
WHEELBASE	114.4 in
L X W X H	N/A
0-60 MPH	2.8 sec (est)
EPA FUEL ECON (CITY/HWY/COMB)	Not rated
EPA RANGE (COMB)	Not rated
ON SALE	Sold out

The car's overall setup was tuned toward understeer to keep things manageable for the amateur drivers in attendance, but even so, we discovered we could somewhat rotate the chassis into corners using the brakes and then confidently go to the power. With more time, we would have found a slightly more comfortable position for the steering wheel, which just like the pedals is easily and quickly adjustable to accommodate a range of driver sizes and preferences, and we disliked the telemetry screen's location where you might normally find a rearview mirror. Lamborghini says it has heard the same from owners and is working on a solution.

Our biggest gripe is we didn't have another 50 laps, not only for fun but also to explore the car's myriad adjustments more deeply. Along with the power/engine map, the trick steering wheel also has controls for tuning the differential, clutch, traction control, ABS, and power steering depending on the circuit and the specific corners you're driving. There are also controls for brake bias, throttle behavior, and more. The total package makes for a mighty engaging and pure race car experience, even though this isn't technically a "race car."

In that way, you could call the Essenza SCV12 a car without a home, except Lamborghini and Squadra Corsa have created a community for owners who understood the vision and what the Essenza offers. But because of its limited numbers and track-only status, there's a good chance you'll never see one, let alone one running in anger. From that perspective, it's tempting to lump it in with other rare modern Lamborghinis that are today mentioned only occasionally by diehard hypercar nerds. And that's a shame, because after driving the Essenza SCV12 as it's made to be driven, we suspect we'll remember this one as being in an entirely different league. **Mac Morrison**



Slicks, aero devices, and a face-punch of power mean you're in for a whole new world of cornering performance.





Intake

Superformance MKIII-E Electric Cobra Prototype

FIRST DRIVE



The future of hot rodding is here, and it's still gnarly.

Electric cars are boring and dumb, and putting an electric motor in a classic car would certainly ruin its character. Right? The Superformance MKIII-E all-electric Shelby Cobra replica says different: It's fun as hell.

Outwardly, the MKIII-E looks like a normal Cobra. Peek inside, though, and something's up: The oddball rearward-mounted manual shifter is gone, the tachometer goes to 14,000 rpm, and the gauges have logos showing a charging cable circling the car's silhouette.

According to Superformance, this is its quickest Cobra ever, and tuning isn't even finalized yet. The rear axle is replaced by a Tesla Model S P100D rear motor, and a 31.2-kWh battery pack is fitted to the reworked engine compartment. All in, the MKIII-E is said to be about 100 pounds lighter than Superformance's 427 V-8 model.

The motor makes 405 hp, and the company says it has 1,500 lb-ft of torque, but we suspect that's at the wheels, not at



the motor. A P100D rear motor makes 503 hp and 525 lb-ft, and power is a mathematical function of torque. The good news, then, is Superformance can turn up the wick for customer cars.

Not that it really needs to. The MKIII-E Cobra is already nuts in a way even gas-fed Cobras aren't. It seems to deliver full torque at any rpm, making it an absolute monster in a straight line. And all you hear is the rush of wind and a bit of gear whine.

Yet the motor doesn't blow the rear tires off the car. That's mostly because it wears street-legal drag radials. Even cold, the tires have so much grip you'll just push the locked front tires along if you try to do a brake stand; the only way you're making smoke is with a rolling burnout, and that's not something to be executed lightly. There's no traction or stability control, and by the time you break the rear tires loose, you're already approaching freeway speeds.

You can whip the MKIII-E into a bend if you're brave enough, but this is still a replica of an old car, and cornering is a hair-on-fire adventure at any velocity. The cowl shake at speed is hilarious. There are no windows. The doors are hollow shells, and the lap belts and headrest-free bucket seats hardly represent the pinnacle of automotive safety. The prototype doesn't even have the optional roll hoop behind the driver.

Really, the only difference between this car and a traditional Cobra is that the EV is faster and quieter.

Well, and more expensive. A Superformance MKIII with a 427 V-8 goes for about $110,000; the MKIII-E will run roughly $180,000. Right now, the 31.2-kWh battery offers about 100 miles of range, and the goal is between 150 and 200 miles. This will involve more batteries, perhaps tucked in the now-empty (and enormous) transmission tunnel. The company also wants to integrate DC fast-charging capability.

The MKIII-E Cobra proves hot rodding is alive and well in the electric age. If you're an old-school enthusiast ready to flip to an EV, you should put your name down now. Because the MKIII-E uses the same chassis and body as the standard MKIII, the backlog for gas cars means it'll be September before the first electric Cobra reaches an owner. That's plenty of time to make it even more bonkers. **Scott Evans**



Superformance MKIII-E	
BASE PRICE	$180,000 (est)
LAYOUT	Rear-motor, RWD, 2-pass, 2-door convertible
MOTOR	405-hp/525-lb-ft induction-type electric
TRANSMISSION	1-speed auto
CURB WEIGHT	2,700 lb (mfr)
WHEELBASE	90.0 in
L X W X H	152.0 x 69.0 x 48.0 in
0-60 MPH	3.5 sec (*MT* est)
EPA FUEL ECON (CITY/HWY/COMB)	Not yet rated
EPA RANGE (COMB)	100 miles (est)
ON SALE	September 2022

PHOTOS BY JESSICA WALKER

Driving stick is an art. Americans developed a preference for automatic transmission in the second half of the 20th century, but their love for manual never disappeared. Die-hard fans of the stick didn't want to give up the control the shift knob offered. As far back as 1985, Honda recognized that every performance enthusiast values this level of command, leading to the creation of the all-new Civic Si. The first-generation Civic Si, powered by a fuel-injected 1.5L SOHC four-cylinder engine, was manufactured with this group in mind. It was designed to accommodate the single most important part of the car: the driver.

For stick enthusiasts, operating a manual demonstrates a high level of mastery. A precise, tactical interplay between man and machine. Balancing the operation of the gas, clutch, stick and brake takes not just practice, but great focus and discipline. Of course, only a truly impressive car deserves this kind of attention. That's where the 2022 Civic Si comes in. The Civic Si's highly tuned suspension design creates a firmer, more responsive ride. And the limited-slip differential, which distributes power between the front wheels, helps drivers corner more smoothly.



The Civic Si offers all the control that you expect from a stick, which starts with its close-ratio, 6-speed manual transmission. A lighter, single-mass flywheel allows the engine to spin up faster. Plus, Rev-Match Control blips the throttle, making it easier to select the next gear with tight, crisp precision. Inside the car, you'll find heavily bolstered sport seats and a 12-channel, 12-speaker Bose Premium Sound System. The vehicle has a low beltline with an open driving view, which enhances the experience of the landscape.

The Civic Si has always provided incredible performance to drivers who are determined to guide their own journeys. For nine generations, Honda has remained dedicated to enhancing the line, adding capability, style and tech upgrades with each successive model. We've long prioritized the experience of the driver, and the all-new 2022 Civic Si is no exception. It's the peak automotive experience. It's the art of the stick.

HONDA

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Intake

2022 Pininfarina Battista

FIRST DRIVE



It's quicker than whatever supercar you drive.

The wild and wonderful Pininfarina Battista is almost more conversation than car. Creating a visual stringboard of what this almost 1,900-hp, quad-motor hypercar represents for the industry, Italy, Pininfarina, the future, and the past would end up looking like the conspiracy room of a dangerous psychotic.

If you're familiar with the world of exotic cars, you know the Pininfarina name is intimately associated with designing Ferraris. But as the market for hired design houses has all but dried up, new management decided to design its own car on borrowed running gear.

The car features a so-called E-Heart that uses two speakers to send a deep, audible resonance through the car, subtly throbbing the sound in a way that can be felt through the seat backs. You'd expect anything with 1,877 hp and 1,740 lb-ft to get you feeling your own heart throbbing, but it's a cool trick. The galactic output comes courtesy of a T-shaped 120-kWh battery pack and an AC permanent-magnet electric motor powering each wheel, delivering 230 miles of range and a claimed 0–60 explosion of 1.8 seconds.

Five drive modes are available: Calma, Pura, Energica, Furiosa, and Carattere, in ascending order of proffered violence. We stuck to sport-minded Energica on the curviest portions of our road drive, but we slipped into Furiosa for the short straights. This type of power in a street car is unprecedented; we have zero reference for what almost 1,900 electric horsepower and 1,740 lb-ft of on-demand torque should feel like. The Pininfarina officials on hand could have told us it was 3,000 hp; we would have just giggled and asked for another go.

It's not hyperbole to say the Battista is a wholly different experience to any other supercar or hypercar on the market today. Not for long, though; the fine folks at Automobili Pininfarina have created the equivalent of a rolling carbon-fiber crystal ball. This, alongside its Rimac Nevera cousin, is an incredible, important, mind-sublimating milestone for supercars, hypercars, and the entire electric car pie slice as a whole. This is what battery-fed exotics will deliver in the next decade—just don't expect them to be as pretty.

Conner Golden

2022 Pininfarina Battista	
BASE PRICE	$2,200,000
LAYOUT	Front/rear motors, AWD, 2-pass, 2-door hatchback
MOTORS	Four AC permanent-magnet electric, 1,877 hp/1,740 lb-ft (comb)
TRANSMISSION	1-speed auto
CURB WEIGHT	4,550 lb (*MT* est)
WHEELBASE	108.1 in
L X W X H	187.0 x 78.2 x 47.6 in (est)
0-60 MPH	1.8 sec (mfr est)
EPA FUEL ECON (CITY/HWY/COMB)	Not yet rated
EPA RANGE (COMB)	310 miles (mfr est)
ON SALE	Now



REAR VIEW

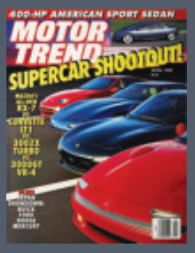
From the *MT* Archive ...



50

APRIL 1972
PRICE: $0.75

Tiring of Detroit's oversized behemoths, our 1972 Auto Show issue lumped Turin, London, Tokyo, and Detroit together and concentrated on futuristic compacts from Europe and Japan. We covered the coming mini-truck war as Ford and Chevy prepped their captive imports (Courier and LUV) to go up against Datsun and Toyota, and we marveled at Mazda's rotary-powered RX-3 and Subaru's Leone, which we'd soon know as the GL. We compared seven tons of American sedans, judging Pontiac's Grand Ville superior to the Mercury Marquis and Dodge Monaco.





30

APRIL 1992
PRICE: $2.95

In the heyday of the Japanese sports car, we pitted the Mazda RX-7 R1, Mitsubishi 3000GT VR-4, and Nissan 300ZX Turbo against the Corvette ZR-1. The results were so close we couldn't pick a winner. We also featured two American-car comparos: Buick Skylark vs. Dodge Spirit vs. Ford Tempo, and Buick Regal vs. Mercury Sable.

10

APRIL 2012
PRICE: $4.99

Our Future Cars issue focused on several cars that would come to be (Acura NSX, Nissan Juke R) and some that wouldn't (Dodge Dart SRT-4). In an epic stick-shift-econobox comparison, we ranked the Hyundai Accent best, followed by the Chevrolet Sonic, Toyota Yaris, Honda Fit, Mazda 2, Suzuki SX4, and Kia Rio.



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Frank Markus

Technologue



5G remote driving could pave the way to full autonomy.



Last month while reading our excerpt from the book *AI 2041: Ten Visions for Our Future* by Kai-Fu Lee and Chen Qiufan, I received a press release for the WayRay Holograktor concept car that seemed to shorten the time horizon the story predicts. "The Holy Driver" in the excerpt was a Sri Lankan gamer who discovers the cars he drives in a simulator to earn money are real vehicles located elsewhere in the world. So this line in WayRay's release widened my eyes: "The three-seat Holograktor has been conceived as a ride-hailing car [that] can be driven by remote control." Is the 5G remote-driven car "a thing," I wondered?

I quickly scheduled a call with Michal Macuda, WayRay's product platform manager, who explained the concept car's main purpose is to demonstrate a new holographic laser-projection technology applied to the windshield and side glass. It allows the car's greenhouse to serve as a virtual/augmented reality headset through which passengers can observe a merging of the metaverse and reality (see the image above). But they can't be driving when they do so, and WayRay reckons we'll have remote-driven cars way sooner than the decade or more it'll take to get full Level 5 autonomy on private vehicles.

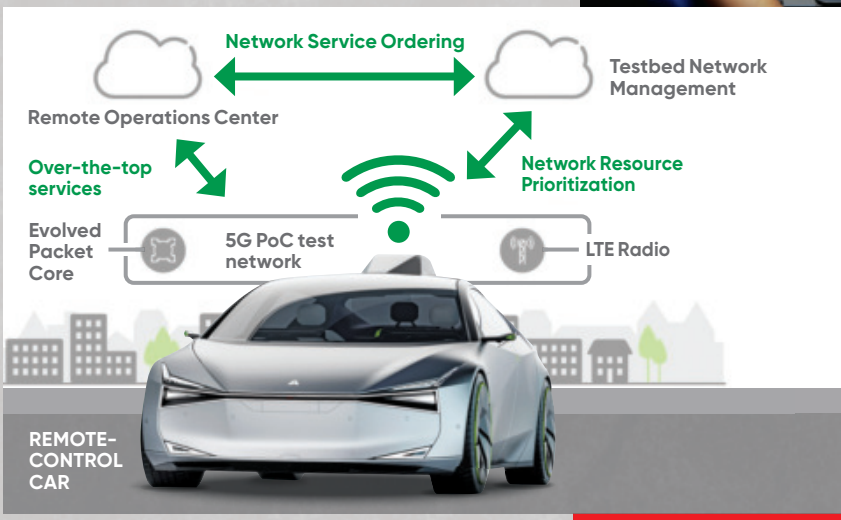
A Las Vegas ride-sharing car-rental startup called Halo, founded by executives from Uber, Cruise Robotics, Proterra, Amazon, and others, is working with T-Mobile. It plans to launch a service soon where vehicles are delivered to and retrieved from the renter via remote control (they're driven manually when people are on board). Sweden's Scania is working on remotely driven buses. Might you soon be able to hire a remote driver to chauffeur you home after you've had one too many?

> I wondered, is the 5G remote-driven car a thing?

The concept makes sense. Now that thermal cameras, Luneburg lens radar, and modern lidar are making crystal-clear long-range sensing affordable, the biggest stumbling block to full autonomy is teaching computers how to cope with "edge cases." Simply hiring and training humans to manage driving tasks remotely could bring the benefits of autonomy to populations like the blind, disabled, and minors (or relocating empty vehicles) soon through the geographic outsourcing of drivers.

Several questions immediately arise. How should info be presented to the driver? Probably not as raw lidar point clouds and radar images. How much data must be transmitted, and can the infrastructure handle it? I posed these questions to many of the relevant experts who gathered in Las Vegas for the CES 2022 trade show in January.

"Eyes see the world differently than cameras," Tom Jellicoe of The Technology Partnership in the U.K. warns. "Event-based vision means we only get a signal from a part of a scene where something's changing, whereas cameras capture everything. Humans constantly reiterate conclusions. Sensor fusion on board cars tries to find the most interesting features in each scene. The challenge will be to try to present data to humans in a way that seems natural, without overwhelming them."



The above schematic shows how data gets transmitted between a Scania remote-controlled bus, the cloud, and the remote operations center using 5G and LTE communications. The WayRay Holograktor shown proposes a similar driving arrangement for ride-hailing.

Nakul Duggal, senior vice president and general manager for automotive at Qualcomm Technologies, worries about the tremendous amount of data that must be transmitted and the challenges of doing so in dense urban centers. But Scania has demonstrated reliable uplink throughput of 10–20 megabits/second—sufficient to sustain a rich 4K video feed, especially with signal processing. WayRay's Macuda says 20–700 ms "latency," or round-trip time (RTT) for the signal, is tolerable. Scania's testing has demonstrated network RTT of less than 50 ms for the most part, with video processing and onboard mechanical actuation contributing the majority of the 185-ms worst-case total response time it has recorded.

Supplier Bosch cited security as a primary reason it is concentrating on supplying a robust sensing suite with software to keep all decision-making on board. I'm willing to bet the telecoms industry can figure out how to secure the data transmission pipeline, but then the remote drivers must be vetted and schooled in our traffic laws, and the remote locations themselves must be secured from attack or infiltration. Bottom line: I'm eager to let a *local* remote driver pilot my car home after a party or deliver me a rental car, but I'm uneasy off-shoring my chauffeur.

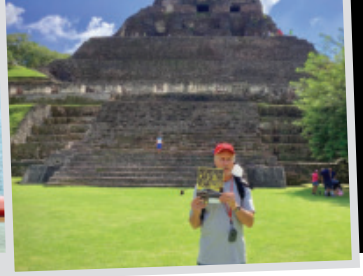


An off-board driver would view a VR composite of camera and other sensor imagery to monitor and/or override the vehicle's controls as needed.

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Your Say...





Reader on Location

This month's reader on location is **Scott Steffenhagen** of St. George, Utah. He writes: "I received my January issue before Thanksgiving and packed it up for reading on our 15-day Caribbean cruise. I also took it with me on our excursion to Belize, where we had a two-hour bus ride to the Xunantunich Mayan ruins. This is just one of the beautiful spots we visited. Another bucket-list spot was the Panama Canal, which didn't disappoint—it was an engineering feat!" *If you'd like to be featured as an upcoming Reader on Location, please email a high-res photo of yourself holding a recent issue, along with a few sentences about your trip, to MotorTrend@MotorTrend.com.*

Corrections: In our March issue, an oversight in our records meant we failed to report a routine service performed on our long-term Mazda CX-30. Our verdict story should have said we spent about $375 on maintenance, not $143.18. Also, a spec template error resulted in us stating the C8 Corvette Z06 is a front-engine car.

Readers Respond to Past Issues

Why don't you print more reader's letters? Other magazines print pages of them, as they are usually funny and entertaining.

Rod O'Byrne
Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada

Easy answer: Spend more time writing funnier letters, and we'll publish 'em. As a friendly reminder, you can write to us at MotorTrend@MotorTrend.com.—Ed.

I love your magazine and the content you put out. The Rivian adventure was amazing, the 2022 COTY competition was epic, and your Future Cars issue made me rewrite my list of favorite cars. But there is one thing I'm sick and tired of seeing and hearing: complaints about the new BMW M3/M4 grilles. The M3 Competition xDrive is my favorite car, tied with the Porsche Taycan Cross Turismo Turbo S. Yes, I know it's not a traditional BMW grille. Yes, I know you guys aren't happy about it spreading to BMW's i4 and iX (awesome!). And yes, I know its power and performance will not stop you from grimacing whenever you step out of the car.

What I'm saying is, online forum wisecrackers and commenters don't buy BMW M3s and M4s. The people who actually buy these cars know what they want out of them. If I had to pick between the M3/M4 and their competitors, I would go with these BMWs every time.

Peter Matiya
via email

You'll love our story on page 59.—Ed.

I loved the SUV of the Year report. One suggestion for those of us who may experience snow and ice is to add test criteria covering those conditions. I have had many AWD vehicles, and each performed differently in deep snow or on ice.

Paul J. Paprocki
Webster, New York

We agree with your point regarding winter-weather testing for AWD SUVs. It's not a perfect analogue, but we run each contender through a deep sand pit that mimics snow and separates good all-wheel drive from bad.—Ed.

I've never written to a magazine in my life, but I felt compelled to comment on your choice of the Rivian R1T as your 2022 Truck of the Year. I read Scott Evans' introduction where he said, "At the heart of the matter: Is a truck defined by its ability to do traditional work? Or is it a lifestyle appeal?"

It is the former. A truck is by definition a tool to "truck" stuff around with, including people. If it can't do its intended job, it should not be TOTY! How many Triumph Bonnevilles can you fit in the Rivian's bed? How many sheets of drywall? If a friend calls and says, "Let's put my quad in your truck and spend the weekend at the dunes," do you have to reply, "I might fit your son's tricycle if I move some stuff around"?

There are still folks who use their trucks to truck. They don't care how cute or nimble it is or how its leather smells. Utility should count for 90 percent in this contest. Please go back and do this comparison over.

Brian Alexander
Studio City, California

Trucks are tools, sure, but most buyers treat them like wagons with open cargo areas, not as heavy-duty vehicles for doing "truck stuff." To your questions, you could squeeze two Triumphs in an R1T's bed, easily fit a quad, and carry quite a lot of drywall.—Ed.

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COULD YOU LIVE WITH A SECONDHAND SUPERCAR?

THE 612-HP, 203-MPH McLAREN GT IS PERFECT FOR THE DAILY DRIVE



WORDS ANGUS MACKENZIE
PHOTOGRAPHY ANGUS MACKENZIE

We've all dreamed the dream. Cash in the 401(k), sell the sensible-shoes SUV, buy something low, fast, and loud, and drive it every day. But could you live with a supercar? And I'm not talking about in those near-mythical magazine-story moments when, as an empty road twists and turns into the distance ahead, you crack open the throttle and start hunting apexes with a 600-hp snarl exploding in your ears. I'm talking real life: crawling through city traffic, schlepping through the suburbs, hum-drumming it on the freeway.

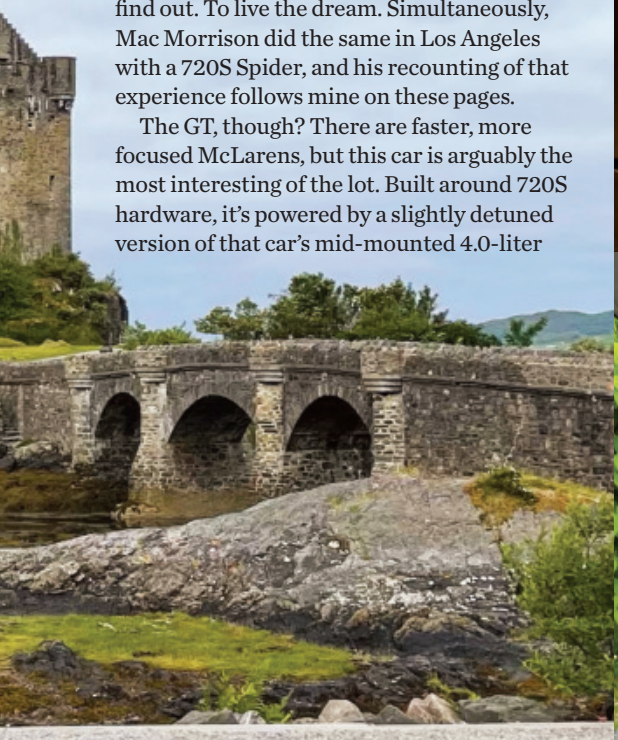
I had three months at home in the U.K. with a McLaren Certified Pre-Owned (CPO) GT to find out. To live the dream. Simultaneously, Mac Morrison did the same in Los Angeles with a 720S Spider, and his recounting of that experience follows mine on these pages.

The GT, though? There are faster, more focused McLarens, but this car is arguably the most interesting of the lot. Built around 720S hardware, it's powered by a slightly detuned version of that car's mid-mounted 4.0-liter













The McLaren GT's rear cargo area holds 14.8 cubic feet of stuff. It's not the most voluminous trunk, but it's sufficient for the few bags you'll need on a quick road trip.

twin-turbo V-8. In GT spec the engine produces 612 hp and 465 lb-ft of torque, still enough to get this 3,373-pounder to 60 mph in a supercar-worthy 2.9 seconds and to a top speed of 203 mph. What makes the GT compelling is that it attempts to combine the performance, handling, and style of a mid-engine supercar with the everyday comfort and usability of a gran turismo.

Supercars are expensive. My Storm Grey over Jet Black GT, with the P22 Luxe interior that's standard on U.S.-spec cars, would have retailed for $232,195 when sold new in early 2020. Fitted options included the MSO Bright package ($5,500), the panoramic roof ($950), the luggage retention strap ($550), and the carbon-ceramic brakes ($6,500 for the 2020 model year but standard on 2021 models). My McLaren CPO vehicle was 1 year old with 4,341 miles on the clock.

Available on cars up to 10 years old that have covered fewer than 75,000 miles and have a full, up-to-date service history, McLaren's CPO program offers a minimum one-year warranty—upgradeable to two years ($4,230)—that includes roadside assistance. There is no mileage limit, and the warranty covers the cost of parts and labor for eligible repairs performed at McLaren dealers and service centers by factory-trained technicians. The warranty covers all factory-fitted components with no limit to the number of claims.



The front storage area (frunk) holds 5.3 cubic feet of gear—the perfect size for a cooler and a few groceries but not much else.

A CPO program's big advantage, though, is that it allows you to buy what is effectively a new car at a discount price. At the time of writing, McLaren's website listed a similarly specced 2020 GT CPO car with just 3,184 miles on the clock for $194,950.

Over the course of my test, the GT averaged 19.5 mpg, notably better than the EPA's 18-mpg-combined rating achieved by the feather-footed testers who never take a car beyond 60 mph during the city and highway fuel-consumption testing cycles. Yep, 19.2 mpg in a 612-hp, 203-mph supercar. I started to wonder whether I should hand back my car guy card.

But as the EPA points out, "Your mileage will vary." And the GT's fuel consumption reflected how it was being used, as I drove it to media events in the U.K. and to visit family living outside London. These journeys comprised regular 100- to 200-mile stints of highway cruising at 70 to 80 mph, the occasional quick run along a quiet country road, bookended by short commutes through stop-start London traffic. And by short, I'm talking distance, not time; in peak traffic it can take up to an hour to do the last 4 miles home.

McLaren's 4.0-liter twin-turbo V-8 is not the most charismatic engine in the business, but there was no sign of the annoying light-throttle engine drone between 1,500 and 2,000 rpm I noticed in the early-build GT I'd driven from Spa, Belgium, to Reims, France, in March 2020. And I quickly learned that even at a relaxed highway pace, the car demanded to be driven every inch of the way, as the supremely accurate and volubly communicative steering required constant attention. A one-finger-on-the-wheel Buick Roadmaster it ain't.

That said, with the suspension set in Comfort mode, the GT's highway ride was pleasantly compliant, and the hip-hugging seats were surprisingly comfortable. Tire noise on coarse tarmac is the car's biggest weakness at cruising speeds, an inevitable byproduct of a firmly bushed suspension bolted to a carbon-fiber chassis. Although the cabin noise level is no worse than you would find in one of the sportier-spec Porsche 911s, the very good Bowers & Wilkins audio system was wasted at speeds exceeding 50 mph.

The GT's easygoing temperament shone around town, the seven-speed dual-clutch slipping neatly between ratios





The McLaren GT handles the day-to-day stresses of city living, its suspension and nimble steering easily navigating tight, pockmarked London streets. But it's on meandering country roads like this where it shines.



THE GT DEMANDS TO BE DRIVEN EVERY INCH OF THE WAY. A ONE-FINGER-ON-THE-WHEEL BUICK ROADMASTER IT AIN'T.





when left to its own devices. Although the ride is firm at low speeds, mainly because of the stiff sidewalls of the 225/35 20-inch front and 295/30 21-inch rear Pirelli P Zeros, the suspension proved supple enough to deal with the worst of London's cratered and cobbled streets. I've driven regular sedans and SUVs on big wheels with performance-oriented suspensions that have felt harsher and more arthritic than the McLaren.

The 4.3 inches of ground clearance and the 10-degree approach angle afforded by the redesigned front end eased both speed-hump and rain-gutter anxiety, while the quick steering was great for avoiding potholes that could pop a tire and crunch a lovely rim. As with most McLarens, the generally good all-around visibility made the GT easy to place in the hurly-burly of London traffic.

After the first month or so, I was convinced that, yes, you could easily live with a McLaren GT every day. But it was in Scotland, on a meandering 36-mile run through the Highlands from Newtonmore to Spean Bridge, that I came to understand why you'd want to.

I never hit more than 80 mph at any point in those 36 miles, but as I cruised into Spean Bridge, I grinned from ear to ear. The twin-turbo V-8's midrange punch and the dual-clutch transmission's lightning response in manual mode enabled the car to effortlessly dispatch the handful of slower turns on the short straights. It scarcely noticed the corners.

The pace—constant, relentless, yet elegantly graceful—had come with minimal effort, my fingers caressing the steering wheel and tickling the shift paddles, my toes brushing the brakes and squeezing the throttle. After years of driving heavy and powerful SUVs, I was reminded of the virtues of light weight, delicate steering, and a low center of gravity.

And I had learned a simple truth about the McLaren GT.

In an era of 200-mph luxury sedans, 600-hp SUVs, and $70,000 pickup trucks, the GT is by virtue of its form typecast as a supercar, as vaingloriously performative as a Lamborghini Aventador. At the same time, it is regarded as a conspicuously compromised vehicle, softer and looser than a 720S to make it drive more like a gran turismo while lacking the gilded interior and usable luggage capacity most people expect in today's GTs.

Understanding this car meant looking past 21st century stereotypes, however. It is a far more nuanced machine than that.

The GT reminded me of an era when people regularly crammed a few soft bags into sports cars they drove every day and headed off on a road trip. These days the conventional wisdom is that low, fast, and loud cars are for tire-shredding track days, or for quiet midweek morning blasts on Angeles Crest Highway, or for posing and preening at Cars and Coffee and on Instagram. If the '60s TV series *Route 66* was pitched today, Tod and Buz would probably drive an F-150 Raptor instead of a Corvette.



The McLaren GT defies today's conventional wisdom.

True, packing the car for a weeklong trip takes more effort than heaving a few bags into the back of a Chevy Suburban. Loading the oddly humped and hollowed space behind the seats requires an awkward stretch over those generously sculpted flanks, and if the car's been running, the vents from the engine can be hot to the touch. If it's been raining, water will cascade off the rear glass and all over your bags.

Still, the GT readily accommodated the four soft bags, plus the extra coats, umbrellas, and waterproof boots Mrs. MacKenzie deemed necessary for our trip north. The deep frunk easily swallowed a big cooler bag and sundry groceries.

The increased ride height and more comfort-oriented suspension might take the edge off the GT's performance on the track, but the setup proved its worth on the often narrow and lumpy Scottish roads. I had to watch for sharp-edged potholes—as I would in anything on big wheels with low-profile tires—but otherwise the McLaren danced across tarmac that would easily tear the underbelly out of lower-slung Ferraris or Lamborghinis. It confidently went anywhere you'd take a 1960s sports car.

And that right there is at the heart of the McLaren GT's appeal. Beneath the supercar swagger is a vehicle you truly can use 24/7. It offers performance and handling that's well beyond that of the automotive mainstream, and it has just enough room for you, a close friend, and your stuff, no matter whether you're heading down to Starbucks for a Saturday morning latte or taking it across the country to see what's around the next corner or over the next hill.

It's a sports car. Like sports cars used to be.

McLarens have a reputation for being fragile, and during the first month it appeared the GT might live up to it. The issue was nothing major—a tire pressure warning light would randomly appear on the dash, and the clock would reset itself to 1 p.m. overnight, which made the navigation system's destination arrival-time calculations meaningless. As the system wouldn't load with the car idling in our underground garage, the clock error may have been a result of it not being able to connect to a satellite. The problem mysteriously resolved itself, however. Nothing else went wrong. Nothing fell off or broke.

Over the course of its stay with me, the GT's best fuel consumption figure was 23.7 mpg over 295 miles while cruising back into London from Scotland. Its worst was 16.7 mpg after some quality cut-and-thrust time on quiet back roads in the south of England. The 19-gallon gas tank meant a realistic highway cruising range of more than 300 miles.

Niggles? McLaren's old infotainment system is slow and fiddly to use. The heat soak through the optional panoramic glass roof made the cabin very hot when I left the GT parked outside, even on mild days, and the sun glare often rendered the infotainment screen unreadable. Rough roads excited a few rattles and squeaks from the interior.

From the original MP4-12C onward, McLaren has made drivers manually activate the switches to adjust the engine/transmission and suspension/stability control settings. Early on, I'd wonder why the GT wasn't switching to Sport or Manual modes before realizing I hadn't pressed the "Active" button in the center console. The new Artura does away with the Active button concept. Good riddance.

So could you live with a pre-owned McLaren GT every day? Well, I could. But it isn't for everyone. The modern luxury gran turismo market is dominated by Bentley's Continental GT V8, a heavy and fast and glitteringly opulent battlecruiser. Others in the segment include Ferrari's staggeringly accomplished Roma and Aston Martin's achingly gorgeous DB11 V8.

Although all, like the McLaren GT, are powered by a 4.0-liter twin-turbo V-8, each offers a strikingly different experience from the other. And the McLaren GT experience is the most unique of the lot. It looks like a supercar and drives like a sports car, rivaled only by the Ferrari for the clarity and precision of its responses. But it will never be quite as relaxed as the Roma with its electronic nannies switched to Cruise mode, much less the more softly resolved Aston or the hushed Bentley.

The McLaren is the most overtly sporty, most extroverted of these GTs. Embrace that fact and all it comes with, and you'll love it. Like I did. ■



2020 McLAREN GT

PRICE	$232,195 (new), $194,950 (CPO used, est)
LAYOUT	Mid-engine, RWD, 2-pass, 2-door hatchback
ENGINE	4.0L/612-hp/465-lb-ft twin-turbo port-injected DOHC 32-valve V-8
TRANSMISSION	7-speed twin-clutch auto
CURB WEIGHT	3,400 lb (mfr)
WHEELBASE	105.3 in
L X W X H	184.4 x 80.5 x 47.8 in
0-60 MPH	2.9 sec (*MT* est)
EPA FUEL ECON (CITY/HWY/COMB)	15/22/18 mpg
OBS FUEL ECON	19.5 mpg (4,859 miles)
EPA RANGE (COMB)	342 miles





The Pacifier

WE'RE REMINDED THAT FEW THINGS BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER LIKE ONE BADASS AUTOMOBILE









WORDS MAC MORRISON
PHOTOGRAPHY BRANDON LIM

"Why do I feel like he's having a much different experience than I am?" I said this aloud to myself on a hot Los Angeles afternoon as I idled "my" certified pre-owned 2020 McLaren 720S Spider in a McDonald's drive-through. Across the pond, Angus MacKenzie, *MotorTrend*'s former editor-in-chief turned international bureau boss, was banging around in "his" GT, along the way taking in a road trip through the Scottish Highlands, and here I was in the middle of tracking down Happy Meal toys promoting a critically panned movie starring L.A.'s self-anointed basketball king. (Blame the 6-year-old for this mission.)

I pictured MacKenzie's window down and his trademark mane fluttering in the salty breeze, hammer to the anvil in his GT passing fairytale Scottish castles, his soothing Australian accent calling out historical landmarks. I could hear a bagpipe legato lulling me into stasis ...

"Hey, sweetie, can I have some money? C'mon!" came the slurred words, accompanied by light jostling of the 720's rear. Snapped back to full consciousness, I looked to the driver-side mirror and absorbed the reflection of a middle-aged, scantily clad, sunbaked (and plain *baked*) woman doing a zombie-dust impression of a pole dance against the back bumper. This wasn't quite what I had in mind when McLaren offered an extended stint in its mega-fast hardtop convertible. Sigh.

The parameters for this "long-term" loan of the 720S Spider were three months or a mileage allotment of 1,500, as McLaren endeavored to align the time/mileage equation with that of its typical U.S. lease customers. Those folks usually lease a car for three years with a 5,000-mile total limit, so 1,500 miles approximates a year's worth of ownership drive time.

I arrived at O'Gara Beverly Hills, McLaren's nearest-to-me dealer, where sales ace and affable car guy Barrett Mitchell awaited with a winning personality and a brief tour of the smallish but swanky store. He didn't flinch when I wanted to sit in the pseudo-Marlboro-liveried, Ayrton Senna double-S-branded Senna GTR parked inside the showroom,

or when I popped off its removable steering wheel for a closer look (just to play with) because racing-style removable steering wheels are cool. What I anticipated would be a relatively brief exchange of pleasantries preceding the handover of the Spider turned into an hourlong jovial bull session on cars, motorsports, and the automotive life in general.

It was all a nice deviation from some dealers' standard ceremony of handing someone the keys to a car that costs well into six figures. No Champagne was uncorked, and the Macca wasn't arranged predictably in the middle of the room under a cover for a dramatic auto-show-style reveal. Not that anyone minds such a presentation, but good old genuine car enthusiast conversation goes further than pomp and circumstance when it comes to getting you amped about celebrating your new acquisition, and about driving it.

We eventually meandered to the little back lot, and there she was, ready to rock. Practically glowing in metallic Belize Blue paint described best as a vibrant, look-at-me-at-all-times turquoise (a $5,270 extra), the 720S was specced nicely with a carbon-fiber overdose, 10-spoke forged wheels ($3,850), a sport exhaust ($5,940), and McLaren's electrochromic transparent roof panel option that changes its percentage of sun-shielding tint at the press of a button ($9,100!). Total cost when new: $375,020. With 2,209 miles on the ticker, McLaren said it would have priced the car between $345,000 and $350,000 had I arrived on this day to purchase it for real. So ballpark the depreciation at about $12.70 per mile, give or take.

Mitchell gave me the standard functional rundown, which I embraced as my 97th career opportunity to disparage the location and design of McLaren's



McLaren's Beverly Hills dealership is small, but it doesn't suffer from a shortage of hyper-compelling hypercars.



power seat switches. The controls are mounted on the seat's bottom inboard side, meaning you must wedge your hand between the center console and seat to access them. This horrendously ill-conceived placement prevents you from looking at what your fingers are doing as you adjust, and with more than one switch for the various settings, finding your preferred driving position is akin to a demented game of Russian roulette whose rules are written in Braille. A proper and comfortable position finally achieved, I saved it to the seat memory and swore a blood oath to never again touch any of these controls.

The reality of how quickly you can obliterate 1,000 miles or so in a modern megacar hits home when you've driven a whole five blocks away from the dealership. Between a packed work schedule, mileage-eating photo shoots, and a personal philosophy of exercising abundant caution while living through the pandemic, I discarded thoughts of track days and overnight road trips. Instead, I vowed to remain calm and not bother worrying about at-the-limit driving antics or seeking opportunities to reach the highest possible speeds, instead using the McLaren as a, *gasp*, "regular" car. Grocery runs, post office drops, hardware store trips (for small items), takeout-dinner pickups, you name it—just grab the Spider's key and go. I felt guilty, like I was cheating the





car, until I realized I was having more fun than anyone ever should at performing routine and mundane errands. But it wasn't necessarily due to the reasons I might've expected.

Here's the thing about the McLaren 720 in general: It's received plenty of praise since it hit the market in 2017, and it also has plenty of quirks (more on that in a bit). But as one fellow *MT* editor commented to me after he assumed control of the car for a couple of days (and after I reminded him to be careful due to just how devastatingly quick and fast it is, as we already knew from previous tests): "People today adore the 720S, but I reckon history will make it a legend. I floored the Spider for the first time while in mid-conversation with a friend in the passenger seat, and he remained giggling breathlessly for minutes after. It's borderline oppressively quick. I mean, it's *So. Freaking. Quick*. Full throttle in its most aggressive powertrain setting narrows your field of vision like some corny B-movie special effect. That's to say nothing of the drama erupting out back as those wheels try to manage the power; there's so much skate and scuttle, it's almost as dramatic as the forward momentum. Seriously, this is in the discussion for GOAT among modern supercars, even if it's not yet acknowledged."

This description of the car's wild character notwithstanding, the answer is, yes, you can live with the 720S, and relatively easily. Even with the skin-melting performance—you never get over the audacious straight-line speed, no matter who you are—the McLaren delivers comfort and at least a little utility when you want it to. More than a minute has passed since supercars across the board automatically carried compromises in the name of performance, or at least were severely limited in their daily drivability, usability,









Barrett Mitchell, left, helps acclimate Morrison to the 720S Spider's functions prior to hitting the street for the first time.





and comfort. Still, the 720 reminds you the days of exotic cars past are long gone.

I didn't think twice about or find a challenge in loading the Spider with a week's supply of food from Trader Joe's, for example, or delivering a pile of packages to UPS, or going anywhere I needed to. (Note: Using the standard front-end lift system is a must if you care at all about preserving the front splitter, no matter where you live. It's a godsend in a place like L.A. that features steep driveways, parking lot ramps, and significant road dips and heaves everywhere you look.) Granted, the grocery runs could at best accommodate a week's or so supply of food for one, not for an entire family, so you need to make a couple of trips to the store if your cupboards are bare and you've literally blown your household's full transportation budget on your McLaren and have nothing else to drive.

Perhaps, maybe, possibly there is one diehard McLaren owner on earth who fits that description. No one playing with a full deck buys a car like this and sweats the storage capacity, and they probably don't sweat the overall 12.2-mpg figure we recorded for the duration of the loan. (Blame the low number on a lack of highway driving and an unwavering desire to accelerate briskly as often as possible; the EPA rates the 2020 McLaren 720S Spider at 15/22/18 mpg city/highway/combined.) Prospective customers more likely will wonder about the ride quality. No problem there; with the excellent adaptable suspension and the powertrain dialed to Comfort and my right foot under control, there were plenty of little moments when I nearly forgot just how much inferno-generating capability I had at my disposal.

I never forgot for more than a moment or three, though, thanks to onlookers' reactions to the car. Perhaps it's the exterior's spaceship-meets-*Tremors*-Graboid styling, but it became obvious when speaking to people that the unmissable paintwork was responsible for a good helping of the attention. Whatever the various reasons, the outpouring of enthusiasm for this car is what made even a trip for a rapid COVID test something to look forward to. We drive and test a lot of vehicles here at *MT*, but there's a hell of a lot more to an automotive experience than raw numbers, and I struggled to recall the last time I drove something that generated this much commotion on practically every outing; perhaps it was a Lamborghini Murciélago more than a decade ago that matched it for sheer streetside shock value. The Spider surprisingly even seemed to catch more eyeballs than the McLaren Senna we drove all over L.A. a year prior, or at least more consistently positive reactions.

With all the attention the car attracts, you have two choices: Act like an arrogant SOB and feed into the expensive-car-owner stereotype (which does no one or the automotive hobby any favors), or own the fact you can potentially bring a ray of joy—however large or small, for however fleeting a moment—to someone else's day. I'm not prone to large helpings of schmaltz, but in an overly stressed-out world, I experienced a remarkable phenomenon repeatedly with the 720S, whereby the decadent Spider made me feel more normal than anything else had in quite some time.

The only challenge to going with this flow is having enough patience. One early-in-the-loan grocery run took 30 minutes longer than anticipated because of the rapid-fire questions and comments that strafed me the moment I climbed out of the seat. More than a few other interactions stood out during our experience, including:

- Loading bags into the Spider in a store parking lot, a man wheeling his own cart paused as he passed by and said, "My son is going to wonder why you're putting your things into his car." This led to a conversation about today's kids and their automotive interests, passions, and aspirations. It seems reports of automotive enthusiasm no longer being a thing among teenagers might be exaggerated.
- Another day, same lot: A first-gen Honda S2000 pulled in and parked nearby. Cue a good discussion with its owner about the S2000's history and merits.
- While fueling at my local pump, a couple of technicians operating the station's smog check bay couldn't hear enough about the McLaren's specs

2020 MCLAREN 720S SPIDER (CPO)	
PRICE	$375,020 (new); $347,000 (CPO used, est)
LAYOUT	Mid-engine, RWD, 2-pass, 2-door coupe
ENGINE	4.0L/710-hp/568-lb-ft twin-turbo port-injected DOHC 32-valve V-8
TRANSMISSION	7-speed twin-clutch auto
CURB WEIGHT	3,150 lb (mfr)
WHEELBASE	105.1 in
L X W X H	178.9 x 85.1 x 47.0 in
0-60 MPH	2.5 sec (*MT* est)
EPA FUEL ECON (CITY/HWY/COMB)	15/22/18 mpg
OBS FUEL ECON	12.2 mpg (1,140 miles)
EPA RANGE (COMB)	342 miles





and performance. I then received an impromptu lecture about the California Highway Patrol's lack of humor, the dangers of speeding, and speculation as to how to best enjoy the 720S without suffering a dark fate.

• Stopped at a red light, a woman I estimated to be in her 60s or early 70s and driving an older Honda CR-V motioned to me to lower the window. When I obliged, she asked as many questions as she could for 30 seconds, capping it with, "I love the color!" as the light turned green.

I could go on. Point is, the Spider was as much a social conduit—a *positive* social conduit—as it was a tool for adrenaline-pumping canyon drives, and I don't know where to begin when it comes to assigning a value to such an indefinable trait. I'm still scratching my head about that one, but it's a real thing you can't ignore.



It's no secret McLarens have a reputation for quirks and issues, and this 2020 720S Spider was no different. It never outright failed during my watch, but several things annoyed me constantly:

• Park the car to get out, and the side windows necessarily drop slightly to clear the roof when the scissor doors open upward. But about every fifth time I got out and closed the door, the window failed to close itself. This necessitated getting back in the car, switching on the ignition, and executing the entire process again. (Warranty repair.)

• At some point early in the loan, the dashboard developed a significant rattle. (Warranty repair.)

• One day as I admired the car while it was parked in my driveway, I noticed the passenger-side door didn't sit flush with the rear quarter panel, an issue that had zero effect on driving and usability but quite a bit more on perceived quality of assembly. (Warranty repair.)

• From time to time, the car sounded an alert that the passenger seat belt wasn't fastened. Thing was, no passenger was aboard, nor were there any items other than my wallet and phone resting in the seat. I'm painfully aware my wallet is nowhere near heavy enough to trip the safety warning. (Warranty repair.)

The CPO McLaren 720S Spider, after three months and a final count of 1,140 miles, proved itself as more than a rolling statement of wealth or a self-indulgent rich boy's toy. Its high price and searing performance make it both of those things, for sure, but the 720S also rewards you beyond those epidermis-deep supercar tropes if you let it do so. Back in the McDonald's drive-through lane, the restaurant's workers had shooed away the pirouetting "dancer," and as I rolled to the pickup window, a 20-something employee began to hand me a drink, then recoiled.

"Wait a minute!" he said as he pulled the cup back inside his station. "Let me wipe this off for you; I don't want it to drip on anything in your car." When I said this might be the best fast-food service I'd ever received, he laughed and replied excitedly, "Which way are you going when you pull out?! Man, you gotta turn right onto the road out of here so I can see and hear this thing go by. Stand on it, man!"

As I prepared to exit onto the main road, my home within sight one block to the *left*, I laughed, flicked the right-hand turn signal, waited for traffic to clear, and smashed the throttle. The last peripheral glimpse I had of McDonald's that day was of a fist pumped through the drive-through window. I laughed harder, and in that moment another realization crystalized: Scottish castles and bagpipes, fantastic as they are, had absolutely nothing on this experience. ■

RIDING DRAGONS SHOULDN'T BE SO EASY

It took me a bit more than one lap in the 2022 Pagani Huayra R to forget founder and CEO Horacio Pagani's plea from the night before: "Please, don't crash it."

We were at the Four Seasons hotel in Austin, Texas, having a nightcap after the penultimate day of the 2021 Pagani Raduno, an event for the brand's owners, which this time culminated at Circuit of the Americas (COTA), the big, Texas-sized Formula 1 track. I was there to drive the latest and perhaps most epic of Pagani's creations to date, the all-new 2022 Huayra R. As of this writing, the bare carbon-titanium Huayra R with gold and white stripes is not just a prototype; it's the only R in existence, though 30 customer examples will soon join it. All 30 of the $3.5 million hypercars are sold, with 14 coming to the U.S. Want one? The waiting list is 24 deep. Two future owners who plunked down hefty deposits for the track-only *macchina*—as Pagani calls his latest creation—received hot laps with hot shoe Jamie Morrow. I also got a few laps with Morrow, but now I get to drive. *MotorTrend* is the only media outlet afforded this opportunity; don't crash it, indeed. But let's back up a bit.

Conceived, almost unbelievably, just 18 months ago, the Huayra R is the spiritual successor to the legendary track-only



DRACARYS! ONE MAN'S ATTEMPT TO TAME THE MOST FEROCIOUS PAGANI YET

WORDS JONNY LIEBERMAN



After Lieberman's turn behind the wheel in Pagani's $3.5 million masterpiece, he swears he wasn't shaking. He'd be forgiven if he was, though.

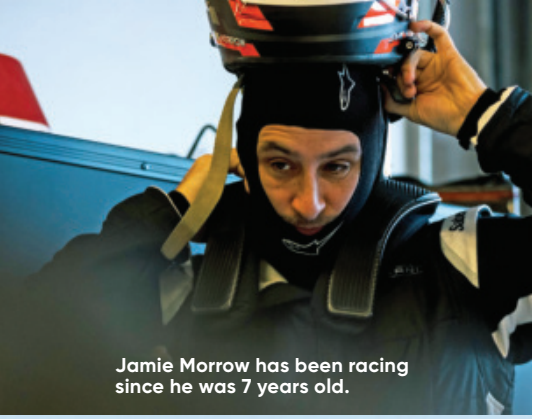
Zonda R. It's almost an entirely new vehicle, too, but structurally and mechanically it shares more with the Zonda R than it does with any previous Huayra.

Specifically, the R shares just three things with the "regular" Huayra: side mirrors, Pagani-stamped titanium bolts, and name. That's it. The Zonda R's engine was an evolution of AMG's 6.0-liter V-12 found in the Mercedes-Benz CLK GTR, as Pagani has a long history with AMG engines dating back to the founder's friendship with Mercedes ambassador and racing legend Juan Manuel Fangio, a fellow Argentine. However, the Huayra R's 6.0-liter naturally aspirated V-12 is a clean-sheet design, built by Germany's HWA, builder of Mercedes DTM race cars.

HWA was founded by Hans Werner Aufrecht, whose surname contributed the letter A to AMG, and today HWA is just down the road from AMG headquarters in Affalterbach, Germany. HWA also built the Huayra R's six-speed, three-disc, non-synchronized dog-ring sequential-manual transmission, which, like the engine, contributes to the chassis' overall rigidity by being hard-mounted to it. Gorgeous equal-length headers and exhaust pipes made from Inconel 625/718 are coated in heat-resistant ceramic and snake their way out of the car's open rump. The Zonda R's screamer was good for 750 hp and 524 lb-ft of torque. The Huayra R's screamier V-12 pumps out an astonishing 850 hp along with 553 lb-ft of twisting force between 5,500 and 8,300 rpm, the latter of which is absurd. Redline is 9,000 rpm, and there are no turbos, no hybrid



Daytona Prototype, LMP1-class race car, the Batmobile—take your pick. The Huayra R is the kind of car that takes adults back to a childlike state of mind.



Jamie Morrow has been racing since he was 7 years old.

assist—just 12 angry cylinders breathing fire through 48 valves. Yikes.

The shape is outlandish. The Huayra R is made mostly from Pagani's proprietary Carbo-Titanium HP62 G2 and Carbo-Triax HP62 (the "HP" stands for Horacio Pagani) materials. Carbo-Titanium is used in places like the passenger cell where energy absorption is key, whereas Carbo-Triax is used where stiffness is paramount—the drivetrain is mounted to Carbo-Triax. The bodywork is vented everywhere, with scoops, scallops, and slashes wherever your eyes fall. The deep aero channels that begin just aft of the A-pillars and run flat down the top of the body, all the way down to movable wings flanking the signature encircled quad exhaust pipes are particularly intriguing. Sorry, I should say the *first* set of movable wings, as a second pair made from aluminum are mounted atop the massive fixed carbon-fiber rear wing.

Grown humans become babbling children in the presence of this wondrous thing. I witnessed it dozens of times in Texas. The severe-looking aero is apparently effective; Pagani claims the R makes 2,200 pounds of downforce at 199 mph. It also claims a "dry weight" of 2,314 pounds, meaning that with fuel (101-octane race gas) and other fluids, curb weight is probably about 2,700 pounds. That would be a weight-to-power ratio of less than 3.2 pounds per hp. Yikes again.

Horacio Pagani spent about 30 minutes explaining the philosophy behind the Huayra R. Surprisingly, safety was the theme he kept coming back to. That notion rang a bit hollow at first, but he insisted this car is for amateur drivers who just so happen to be some of the wealthiest people on earth. In other words, his best customers. Viewed through that lens, safety makes the most sense. Pagani's long partnership with Mercedes-Benz paid off here, as the German giant took the lead on the safety stuff—crash structure, specifically—leaving the Pagani team free to do what it does best: build rolling works of art out of the most exotic materials in the automotive kingdom.

The Huayra R's cold start is ferocious. Stand behind the barely muffled pipes, and you flinch when the big, shrieky V-12 roars to life. The idle was both mesmerizing and intoxicating, though it turned out I'd heard nothing yet.

Morrow had never driven the R before, so he headed out for some shakedown sessions. At 3.4 miles long, COTA is a big track, and the Huayra R was (unbelievably) out of earshot for about 90 seconds. Then, standing in pit lane, we heard the monster coming through Turns 16, 17, and 18, downshifting for 19, a bit of throttle, and then all the way down to first gear for Turn 20. Friends, I wish you could have been there. Remember *Game of Thrones* and the noise the dragons made just before they spat fire and melted Daenerys' enemies? That's what the Huayra R sounds like. The noise was this unbelievable high-pitched, multilayered, multitracked wail of uncorked mechanical madness. The crazy part: After getting in trouble for noise while testing in Europe, Pagani decided to install two silencers on the exhaust system. Your Huayra could be much louder.

Now I was in the passenger seat as Morrow headed out for three laps. The R rolls on Pirelli P Zero race slicks, and if you've never been in a car on slicks, the first thing you notice is how hard the brakes bite. Not to be too blue, but because of the subbelt on the six-point racing harness, you feel the braking potency mostly via your crotch.

Between Turns 1 and 2 there's a small straight with a stretch of tortured, bumpy pavement; the Huayra R felt as if it jumped off the ground an inch or two as it hit that section. Inside the car, with a helmet wrapped around my noggin, the car seemed quieter than from outside. Mind you, Morrow tried to tell me something as we rolled out of the pits at 30 mph, and I couldn't hear him. I've spent a career sitting next to Randy Pobst, so I'm quite used to being a supercar passenger, but there were a few moments when the V-12's full thrust shocked me. So much naturally aspirated torque so high up in the rev range made no sense. Yikes number three.

My turn to drive. Getting in was a challenge, but not too bad. My frame is about the maximum possible width for the Huayra R's seat, and the adjustable pedals were set for a shorter person. Starting the car is a trip: Flick the main ignition switch down and flip the secondary ignition switch up, and the fuel and oil pumps start pumping. Wait for a man standing next to the car to give you a thumbs-up, foot on the brake pedal, and press the Start button on the upper right side of the steering wheel. The starter whirls for what seems like 15 seconds and then, *Dracarys*, the fire spitter behind your head starts howling.

Everything vibrates and buzzes, but not like some simple drumbeat. The Huayra R has a melody to its idle, and it's wonderful. Pull the right-hand paddle to select first gear, though the clutch remains open. Next, you press the Drive button on the wheel's bottom left corner to close the clutch. You now have 15 seconds to get rolling or the clutch will open again. Finally, I'm moving down pit lane toward glorious open track. I hit the Pit Speed button to turn off the limiter, and I smile.





The initial plan called for three laps. However, at the last minute, Pagani's son Christopher said I should go ahead and take five. Morrow and I tried to work out the best way for me to get the most out of my short time (17 miles in all) in the Huayra R. Seeing as there was no way for him to communicate with me from inside the vehicle, we decided he'd jump into the 811-lb-ft Huayra Roadster BC, and I'd follow about five car lengths back. Add all that torque to the RBC's 791 hp, plus the knowledge this very Huayra RBC is the car that set the production car lap record at the Spa-Francorchamps F1 circuit in Belgium (beating a McLaren Senna), and yeah, it scoots. That said, considering the delta in driver skill, Morrow could have stayed in front of me in a food truck.

2022 PAGANI HUAYRA R	
BASE PRICE	$3,500,000
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Mid-engine, RWD, 2-pass, 2-door coupe
ENGINE	6.0L/850-hp/553-lb-ft direct-injected DOHC 48-valve V-12
TRANSMISSION	6-speed sequential manual
CURB WEIGHT	2,700 lb (est)
WHEELBASE	110.0 in
LENGTH X WIDTH X HEIGHT	192.9 x 81.5 x 48.1 in
0-60 MPH	3.5 sec (*MT* est)
EPA CITY/HWY/ COMB FUEL ECON	Not rated
ON SALE IN U.S.	Sold out

The first lap was purposely slow. As I felt everything out, I was most sharply aware my legs were way too close to my body. But if being a human pretzel is what it takes, dip me in salty mustard. My first impression is how easy the super-intimidating hyper track car is to drive. Simple, really. There's the throttle and the brake, and the gears are handled by the paddles on the back of the racing-style steering wheel. That's basically it. Shift lights appear, starting with green, then turning yellow on their way to full red. It takes me two laps to realize the lights go full red way below actual redline, probably at peak torque. A four-digit numerical tachometer frantically changes with the engine's revs, but I'm not looking. There's also a digital speedometer I only pay attention to on the long back straight. I see 249 kph—155 mph—on the first lap. Not a bad start.

We finally start to boogie on the short front straight in full view of the grandstands and all the Pagani owners who will not be driving the Huayra R. "Don't crash it," I laugh to myself as we whizz by. Big braking—wonderful braking—up the hill





The controls look intimidating, but they really aren't. Once underway, all you need pay attention to is the wheel, shift paddle, throttle, and brake pedal.

and down into first gear for Turn 1. I'm slapped across the face with the realization that it's just a car. A supremely mighty one, sure, but I got this. Pagani's plea fades, and I just start driving. The jump over the bumps I noticed from the passenger seat? Not there from where I was now sitting.

In fact, the R is remarkably neutral, no doubt part of Pagani's push for safety. There's no oversteer whatsoever, and I didn't notice a lick of understeer, either. Was I going hard enough to invoke push, something Morrow complained about during his early sessions before the tire pressures were set? I don't know, but in my mind, we went pretty hard on the last three laps. In fact, I noticed the back end of the RBC in front of me step out several times. That's 811 lb-ft for you. On the other hand, he was on street tires; unlike the Huayra R, the RBC is a road car.

The Huayra R exhibited no ill behavior whatsoever. More important, I detected no degradation in handling, no drop-off from one lap to the next. The braking distances stayed the same, the rear never wagged, the front never pushed. As it was my first (and only) session, Pagani and the HWA team decided to put the throttle map in Wet for my laps; this setting makes the throttle a bit less "stabby." We also put the traction control at 8 (out of 12, and there is no stability control) and the ABS at 8. Morrow the pro ran his laps first in 7 and then in 6. The kookiest part was that on the last two laps I found myself having to lift to maintain distance behind the RBC. Pro driver in a monster of a machine in front, rank amateur catching him in a few spots—this should be impossible, but it happened. Later, I asked Morrow how hard he had driven. "Honestly, I could have gone a little faster," he said. "But not much." Me too, man. Me too.

It's funny how the demise of internal combustion is bringing forth the best engines ever built. Chevy's LT6, a 670-hp flat-plane-crank masterpiece, is the most powerful naturally aspirated V-8 of all time. The 6.5-liter V-12 in the Ferrari 812 Competizione makes 819 ponies and revs to a belief-beggaring 9,500 rpm. I imagine the 2022 Pagani Huayra R's fire-spitting heart bests them both in terms of not only power but also raw ya-yas. When you don't have to worry about emissions or noise laws, things get easier and nastier. Come to think of it, "easy" and "nasty" are my two big takeaways after five laps in this screaming dragon of a track-murdering masterpiece—but there was no need to tame the Pagani Huayra R. All I had to do was ride. ■



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TIP OF

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WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY
MOTORTREND STAFF



OUR INAUGURAL PVOTY EVALUATION RAN THE MARKET'S SHARPEST CARS THROUGH THE GAUNTLET IN SEARCH OF THE BEST OF THE BEST

THE SPEAR

BEST DRIVER'S CAR IS DEAD. LONG LIVE PERFORMANCE VEHICLE OF THE YEAR.



The game has changed, but any longtime *MotorTrend* reader will be familiar with the rules.

There are two key positives we netted by changing our annual high-performance hullabaloo to a *MotorTrend* Of The Year program. First, the number of cars competing increases substantially. With Best Driver's Car we were hamstrung by logistics and could only ever evaluate a maximum of 12 vehicles. Year One of Performance Vehicle of the Year saw a field of 22 contenders, and if not for the pandemic, the semiconductor chip shortage, and general supply chain woes, the number would have been greater. Second, the amount of time our judges get with each car increases, especially on the track. We did lose the amazing contributions of professional race car driver Randy Pobst and his Laguna Seca lap times, but these changes allow for a better story with a better verdict.



We began PVOTY at Hyundai's desert proving ground in California City. Our test team arrived a week early to get numbers from every contender. To give you an idea of what our test drivers do, they fling each car around our figure-eight course at least five times. If the team isn't happy about the performance, three cooldown laps occur before another five hard laps. Plus, with some vehicles rolling on R-compound tires, you need to heat up the rubber before your laps, so there's even more driving. Best-case scenario with 22 cars is more than 200 laps, and please see Murphy's Law for the odds of best cases ever working out. Our photo team arrived with the test team and shot roughly 1,000 images—per vehicle!

Next, the official judges arrived at Hyundai and proceeded to conduct walkarounds of every vehicle to make sure everyone was up to speed about what they faced. Few on staff had driven many of the contenders, and certainly no one had driven them all. Only one judge had previously driven the Lamborghini Huracán STO. We had the VW Golf R and Toyobaru twins at our Car of the Year event, but not every PVOTY judge attended COTY.

What's in a walkaround? Well, for example, I was tasked with explaining the BMW Alpina XB7 to the rest of the judges. I broke down why it's in the contest (it's a 612-hp SUV) and what vehicles it competes with in reality. I pointed out its engine's unique tune, the hidden shift buttons, and the Alpina-spec 23-inch Pirelli P Zero tires—"Cool Features," as we term it on our internal template, that you wouldn't necessarily figure out while flinging cars around a proving ground.

We then drive quite a bit, and for the next two days we had free rein of Hyundai's awesome facility. We used the high-speed, 6-mile oval to evaluate ride quality—how does a car feel cruising at 120 mph for three minutes? The judges also had access to the figure eight and skidpad, as well as the special surfaces area (split mu, potholes, Botts' dots, broken pavement, and the like). The bulk of our evaluations took place on Hyundai's winding road course, which, let's face it, is what you want out of a performance vehicle test. The winding layout isn't quite a true racetrack, but it's not *not* a racetrack, either. Wink, wink.



After every judge drove every vehicle, we all sat down to cull the herd from 22 contenders to the finalists, though we had no set number in mind. The remaining vehicles would go on to the canyon and track portions of our test. This, of course, proved very straightforward and easy. Kidding! What's the line from *A Christmas Story*? "In the heat of battle my father wove a tapestry of obscenity that, as far as we know, is still hanging in space over Lake Michigan." Yeah, well, if you ever find yourself in the Mojave Desert, don't look up.

There were many fearsome battles. The one that stands out most concerned the BMW M5 CS. Because of supply chain issues, BMW was unable to deliver us a car with the proper tires equipped (the ones the CS was developed around). Even though some of us couldn't comprehend the M5 CS getting cut, well, cut it was. That's democracy for you, and we wound up with nine finalists.

The next leg of PVOTY activities began with a bang, as deputy editor Alex Stoklosa managed to battle a bear (*a bear!*) with the Mercedes-AMG GT Black Series on the way to our meeting point atop Angeles Crest



WE QUICKLY FOUND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PROVING GROUND AND REALITY.



By moving to our tried and true Of The Year format, we were able to double the field of what Best Driver's Car could handle.

Highway, just north of L.A. Fortunately, it was a small bear, and—well, for a bit more on what happened, check out the Black's capsule review. With the help of the California Highway Patrol, we ran each car on a 12-mile loop from our basecamp above the twin tunnels down to the Mount Waterman Ski Lifts and back.

We quickly figured out the difference between the smooth, wide-open proving ground laps and the reality of keeping a vehicle in a single lane over beaten-up tarmac. Some vehicles, like the Hyundai Veloster N, gained favor in our collective estimation. Others, like the AMG, lost points, figuratively speaking. We had an inkling we'd discover things like this, based on the years of running our other OTY programs in this same manner. It was nice to be proven correct.

Our next and final stop was the Streets of Willow, the smaller, curvier track at Willow Springs International Raceway. Monster vehicles like the three in our Big Wing Gang (AMG GT Black Series, Porsche 911 GT3, Huracán STO) would be a bit restricted on this shorter course. The other side of that coin was that vehicles like Toyota's GR86 and the Veloster N would be lost at sea on Willow's big track. Moreover, we elected to run Streets backward, for two reasons. First was safety, specifically because the infamous high-speed downhill kink is taken out of the equation. With each judge running five laps per car and nine finalists, that's 45 hot laps per judge, 315 laps total. That's a lot of opportunities for something to go wrong. Second, if you've ever driven Streets backward, you know it's more fun.

As we discovered the day before on ACH, opinions about the vehicles changed based on the environment. A couple of the ACH darlings lost some appeal after suffering horrible brake fade on the track. We're looking at you, Hyundai and Toyota. On the other hand, the two Cadillacs drew massive praise and huzzahs over their world-class, repeatable stopping prowess. Then there was the case of the AMG, which was collectively deemed "too much" for the street but did better on the track. However, there were two vehicles that sang and danced wonderfully in all three locations. After a surprisingly mellow debate, and by a 5-to-2 margin of victory, we had our inaugural Performance Vehicle of the Year winner. **Jonny Lieberman**





We subjected the finalists to track evaluations at the Streets of Willow Springs, though we ran it backward because it's more fun.







For the first time, we bestow the famed Golden Calipers on the best performance vehicle of the year.





If you're going to properly evaluate performance cars, you'll inevitably shred a tire or two. Thankfully, we had a few extras on hand.





Testing the limits of cars like these on public roads isn't exactly safe, so California Highway Patrol closed the Crest to keep traffic at bay while we did our jobs.

Contenders

2021 Acura TLX Type S



PROS Looks the business • Good on a back road at reasonable speeds • Neat screen animations
CONS Sloppy, inconsistent on-limit handling • Light-switch brakes • Underwhelming engine



We were as excited as anyone to see Acura's venerable Type S performance subbrand make its triumphant return after a 13-year absence. But in our closed-course Performance Vehicle of the Year testing, the TLX Type S was a resounding disappointment.

Based on our previous reporting, this verdict surprised. Past street drives had convinced us the new TLX Type S was a legitimate sport sedan that could just use a little more power. In our PVOTY testing, though, we discovered its street moves don't at all translate to near- or on-limit handling. What works at quick but reasonable speeds on a back road falls apart when you push the car hard on a track.

Far and away our biggest source of frustration was the inconsistent Super Handling All-Wheel Drive (SH-AWD) system. Despite knowing the Type S carries 59 percent of its hefty 4,100 or so pounds on its front wheels—and as such needs to be driven like a FWD car—and despite knowing the torque-vectoring AWD system won't kick in until power is applied, judges couldn't provoke consistent responses from the car.

"If smooth is fast, then this is the opposite," senior features editor Jonny Lieberman said.

In some cases, getting on the gas would send too much power to the outside rear tire and send the car into wild oversteer. In others, it felt like no power at all was being shuttled rearward, leaving the car to understeer hopelessly. Then, every so often, SH-AWD would send just the right amount of power to each wheel and the car would shoot out of the corner like it should, though not without grinding the front outside tire in the process. You never knew what you were going to get, but often it was too much or too little of what you wanted.



"You shouldn't have to be a massively experienced track driver using advanced track techniques to get some fun out of the Type S," executive editor Mac Morrison said. "But you need to *make* this car turn by unweighting the rear, left-foot braking some in corners to keep the nose planted and to rotate the car—and it's still difficult to get the result you want."

Equally frustrating, the brake-by-wire system was virtually impossible to modulate. In heavy braking zones, the brakes' grabbiness inspired confidence the big sedan would stop in time, but it was an annoyance everywhere else. The slightest press of the pedal had the car standing on its nose, making it extremely difficult to drive smoothly and consistently.

Although the TLX Type S can handle its weight at moderately fast speeds, going all out results in far too much body roll. Stiffening the adaptive dampers does nothing to improve the handling; it just makes the ride quality worse.

On the other end, the combination of a heavy car and segment-trailing power and torque result in an engine that feels fine but not powerful enough for the job it's asked to do.

For a company that rebranded itself as the purveyor of "precision crafted performance," Acura didn't get the TLX Type S where it needs to be. It's a quickish premium sedan but certainly not a four-door sports car.

Scott Evans



SPECS	2021 ACURA TLX TYPE S SH-AWD
BASE PRICE/AS TESTED	$53,845/$55,145
POWER (SAE NET)	355 hp @ 5,500 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	354 lb-ft @ 1,400 rpm
ACCEL, 0–60 MPH	5.1 sec
QUARTER MILE	13.7 sec @ 101.8 mph
BRAKING, 60–0 MPH	112 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	0.97 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	25.0 sec @ 0.75 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB	19/24/21 mpg
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front-engine, AWD, 5-pass, 4-door sedan
ENGINE, TRANSMISSION	3.0L turbo direct-injected DOHC 24-valve 60-degree V-6, 10-speed automatic
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	4,183 lb (59/41%)
WHEELBASE	113.0 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	194.6 x 75.2 x 56.4 in
ON SALE	Now







2022 Audi RS Q8



PROS Chonky looks • Absurdly quick • Gobs of grip from 23-inch summer tires
CONS Ride never settles down • Witless transmission • Feels its size, with test-worst stopping distance

It's helpful when things look the way they drive. Gaze upon the Audi RS Q8, the most powerful, sportiest version of the two-row Q8 you can buy, and there's no missing its chunky shape, big tires, and—well—its visual mass.

At 5,452 pounds, the RS Q8 has a lot of actual mass, too; it's the second-heaviest vehicle evaluated at our inaugural Performance Vehicle of the Year test, behind the BMW Alpina XB7, a luxury-lined three-row SUV weighing about 200 pounds more. Needless to say, that's a lot of cheddar to spread over a twisting road.

Sure, the RS Q8 is quick. With 591 horsepower and 590 lb-ft of torque, it ripped to 60 mph in 3.4 seconds, well ahead of the XB7's 4.0 seconds. By the time it passed a quarter mile, the Audi was traveling 116.2 mph, and it took just 11.8 seconds to get there. Stops from 60 mph took 114 feet, and the Audi's 23-inch(!) summer tires hung on for 1.00 g of grip around our skidpad.



But the picture around those glowing performance specs is filled in with disappointment. The ride, for starters, is tuned seemingly for freshly laid surfaces that have had every last imperfection shaved off. On more realistic roads—if you can call a proving ground's pavement such—the Audi refused to settle down. Blame the gigantic wheels, blame the damper tuning, blame whatever you want, but over less than perfect roads, the RS Q8 jitters and jiggles, particularly in its sportier drive modes. There's wheel flutter—the sense the tires are almost bouncing against the ground—and then there are the body's pogo sensations translated to occupants' fleshy bits. Think you're cut? This Audi will find your soft parts and make them quiver.

Ignoring the discombobulated suspension tuning, which is tolerable only in its Normal setting, the handling is capable, not satisfying. There's a difference. With 56 percent of its mass loading the front tires, the Audi drops its shoulder into corners like a linebacker. (The XB7, which weighs even more, feels lighter on its feet thanks to the inverse weight distribution.) A dab of brake sets the Q8's schnoz down hard on the outside tire; luckily, you can shove the big Audi through using the mighty twin-turbo V-8, whose torque can be directed to the outside rear tire via Quattro AWD and the torque-vectoring rear differential. You'll need to wait a beat while the transmission fumbles to downshift, but it gets there eventually. The whole dance feels deliberate.

If Audi could mitigate the RS Q8's less appreciated vibes while keeping its snarly V-8 noise, urgent acceleration, and clever all-wheel drive, it'd have something here. As it sits, our judges quickly voted the RS Q8 out of the finalist round.

Conveniently, the prototype for this idealized Audi was a competitor here, as well: the Porsche Cayenne Turbo GT. Riding on the same MLB platform and using the same V-8 and other related components, the some-500-pounds-lighter Porsche wipes the floor with the Audi at the test track while behaving civilly on the street. Ditto other monster MLB-based SUVs, the Lamborghini Urus and Bentley Bentayga Speed. Those vehicles boast moves that belie their size and heft. In the case of this Audi, though, looks aren't deceiving.

Alexander Stoklosa



SPECS	2022 AUDI RS Q8
BASE PRICE/AS TESTED	$120,495/$139,790
POWER (SAE NET)	591 hp @ 6,000 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	590 lb-ft @ 2,200 rpm
ACCEL, 0-60 MPH	3.4 sec
QUARTER MILE	11.8 sec @ 116.2 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	114 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	1.00 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	24.0 sec @ 0.86 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB	13/19/15 mpg
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front-engine, AWD, 5-pass, 4-door SUV
ENGINE, TRANSMISSION	4.0L twin-turbo direct-injected DOHC 32-valve 90-deg V-8, 8-speed automatic
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	5,452 lb (56/44%)
WHEELBASE	117.9 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	197.3 x 78.7 x 66.7 in
ON SALE	Now







2022 BMW Alpina B8 Gran Coupe



PROS Prodigious power • All-wheel-drive system works flawlessly • Grand touring style
CONS Not quite an on-limit handler • Lacks excitement • Value's in the eye of the beholder

Living somewhere in the white space between Gran Coupe versions like the BMW M850i and M8 Competition is this slightly more refined-looking and sophisticated model, one that doesn't deliver quite as much aggression as the M8 but offers nearly as much performance and a similar price tag. In essence, it's the big-time baller of the 8 Series crew—an 8-baller, if you will.

This is the 2022 BMW Alpina B8 Gran Coupe, a car that can lope along all day at triple-digit speeds and look fine doing it, as several Performance Vehicle of the Year judges discovered for themselves during evaluation loops at the Hyundai Proving Ground.

"The B8 is absolutely at home on the oval at 120 mph," senior features editor Jonny Lieberman said. "Calm, cool, and collected: This machine was made to drive fast in absolute comfort. Mission accomplished."



Rolling in superfly style on an Alpina 20-spoke, 20-inch wheel and tire package, the B8 looks every bit the part of a polished grand tourer. But its stonking 4.4-liter twin-turbo V-8 powers a wild side with 612 hp and 590 lb-ft of torque, backed by an eight-speed transmission and standard all-wheel drive. It's a combination that had the judges' tongues wagging.

"The best part about the Alpina is its powertrain," features editor Christian Seabaugh said. "The V-8 is meaty and sounds great, and I love how quick the transmission is to downshift and let the V-8 sing."

The performance numbers are duly impressive. At the test track, the Alpina B8 Gran Coupe barreled to 60 mph in just 3.2 seconds on to an 11.4-second quarter-mile time at 123 mph flat. That's dang fast in a straight line. The B8 is also extremely accomplished in the stopping department, taking just 99 feet to haul down from 60 mph.

"Great brakes, especially considering they're steel," said features editor and resident brake-fire lighter Scott Evans (so he should know). "They hold up well to abuse and have a ton of stopping power. I'd like a more progressive pedal feel, but it gets the job done."

Given what Alpina had to work with as far as its powertrain and underpinnings go, it's not a surprise the B8 Gran Coupe can move out with the best of the 8 Series bunch and can stop just as briskly. But judges found the B8 felt hefty on the track, and although it had more than enough grip (its 1.01-g skidpad number is impressive) and tire to stay planted around Hyundai's winding road circuit, there was a universal sense this car is better suited to straight-line, high-speed touring. That's not a bad thing, mind you, and it's likely what Alpina had in mind when it tuned the B8 and trimmed its cabin.

But when we're talking about Performance Vehicle of the Year, we look for machines that have a smidge more all-around go than the show of an 8-baller like the B8.

"This is a fundamentally good car," Evans said. "It drives great for its size and weight, and it's actually enjoyable while doing it. I really have no qualms with it. It's just too big and heavy to win this competition." **Mike Floyd**



SPECS	2022 BMW ALPINA B8 GRAN COUPE
BASE PRICE/AS TESTED	$140,895/$148,095
POWER (SAE NET)	612 hp @ 5,500 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	590 lb-ft @ 2,000 rpm
ACCEL, 0-60 MPH	3.2 sec
QUARTER MILE	11.4 sec @ 123.0 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	99 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	1.01 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	23.7 sec @ 0.89 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB	17/24/19 mpg
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front-engine, AWD, 5-pass, 4-door sedan
ENGINE, TRANSMISSION	4.4L twin-turbo direct-injected DOHC 32-valve 90-degree V-8, 8-speed auto
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	4,706 lb (54/46%)
WHEELBASE	119.0 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	200.4 x 76.1 x 56.0 in
ON SALE	Now



Contenders



2021 BMW Alpina XB7





PROS Luxury abounds • Big meanie of a motor • Wonderful tires
CONS Wobbly ride • Massive • The X7 isn't a great starting point



Let's come right out and say it: If this contest were the 2022 Luxury Vehicle of the Year, you'd be reading about a finalist. True, in general we're not fans of the BMW X7. It came in fourth in a four-way comparison test behind bitter rival Mercedes-Benz GLS and two American three-rows, the Cadillac Escalade and compa-ro-winning Lincoln Navigator. Our big gripe is body control, specifically the lack thereof. As features editor Scott Evans said of the X7, "The body is always moving around, side to side, diagonally, front, and back." Seems as if Alpina, BMW's quasi-in-house tuning wing, had a mountain to climb. And climb it did.

The first big change is what's under the hood. As BMW has yet to wade into the cash-flush waters with its own X7 M, the XB7 gets a cranked-up version of the X7 M50i's 4.4-liter twin-turbo V-8. Bigger turbos, more cooling, and a freer-flowing exhaust mean 612 horsepower (up from 523 hp) and 590 lb-ft of torque (up from 553 lb-ft). Other performance-focused changes include a beefed-up ZF eight-speed automatic, as well as tuned air springs, dampers, and anti-roll bars.

"I've gotta give the Alpina people a lot of credit here" Evans said. "They did everything right. The simple fact is, they started with a big, heavy, floaty, three-row luxury SUV and had to teach it to dance." Alpina's efforts made some of us quite happy. Like edito-rial ops director Mike Floyd: "Beast mode! The Alpina B7 is hilarious to drive around the winding track. It's a handful but a handful of fun! Like a big, charging rhino!"

The hopped-up power is lovely, of course, and the XB7's numbers impressed. A 4-seconds-flat 0–60-mph time is aces, and 12.4 seconds down the quarter mile with a 114.0-mph trap speed is near bonkers for an SUV weighing close to three tons. Look, if you have to get three rows of rich people somewhere in a hurry, the Alpina XB7 might be the very best way to do it. Moreover, the purple people schlepper loved being at autobahn speeds. The ride quality at 120 mph on smooth surfaces was impressive.

We also dug its brakes. "I appreciate the massive braking power of a seven-seat panic room on wheels," head of editorial Ed Loh said. A huge amount of credit goes to the tires. Said Evans: "These Alpina-spec Pirelli P Zeros do a commendable job of putting the power down. You can come out of a corner with a truly surprising amount of throttle and not overpower either end."

Then the praise basically stops. "I'm not impressed," executive editor Mac Morrison said. "It's a great luxury car, comfortable, smooth, and powerful. But as a performance car, it doesn't work. It's super heavy. Doesn't handle particularly well. You're just always aware of the weight." We've found that you can fight physics up to a point, then you lose.

Features editor Christian Seabaugh is not as kind. "In sum, this is the best version of a mediocre luxury SUV. I was hoping the Alpina XB7 would fix many of the X7's flaws, but it unfortunately doesn't." He's available for the funerals of your enemies, just drop us a line. To conclude, remember what Evans said earlier, about how Alpina tried to teach the X7 to dance? He added, "but like many of those dancing shows on TV, you can tell the amateur has learned the choreography but still doesn't have the moves."

Jonny Lieberman



SPECS	2021 BMW ALPINA XB7
BASE PRICE/AS TESTED	$142,295/$156,345
POWER (SAE NET)	612 hp @ 5,500 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	590 lb-ft @ 2,900 rpm
ACCEL, 0–60 MPH	4.0 sec
QUARTER MILE	12.4 sec @ 114.0 mph
BRAKING, 60–0 MPH	100 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	0.95 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	24.8 sec @ 0.78 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB	15/21/17 mpg
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front-engine, AWD, 6-pass, 4-door SUV
ENGINE, TRANSMISSION	4.4L twin-turbo direct-injected DOHC 32-valve 90-degree V-8, 8-speed automatic
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	5,621 lb (46/54%)
WHEELBASE	122.2 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	203.3 x 78.7 x 70.7 in
ON SALE	Now



Contenders



2021 BMW M4



PROS Strong brakes • Excellent front grip • Throttle-induced, grin-producing rotation
CONS Worst manual here • Cartoonish controls • Ride quality suffers as speed increases



Behold, the BMW M4! Rear-wheel drive with a six-speed manual. The most affordable base price of any Bavarian at our PVOTY party alongside an M-barrassment of M- and Alpina-badged riches. BMW performance at its purest, right?

Not quite. Despite wanting to love this seemingly stripped-down I-6 turbo coupe, our judges found some of the most important driver touchpoints overwrought or undercooked. The M-badged steering wheel was deemed comically thick, the seats side-stabbingly over-bolstered, and infotainment menus cartoony (or fun, depending on who you asked). And that six-speed manual? A BMW birthright and this M4's calling card? Universally savaged. Every judge used variations of the word "rubbery" to describe it; three dubbed it "easily the worst manual here."

Adding insult to injury, opting for the manual effectively limits engine output by 30 horsepower and 73 lb-ft of torque. Competition-spec M3 and M4 models are only available with a sturdy, fast-shifting eight-speed automatic that can handle up to 503 hp and 479 lb-ft of torque and can be had with BMW's xDrive all-wheel-drive system. The extra power, torque, gears, and driven wheels combine to create a chasm at the dragstrip. The M4 requires a full 1.2 seconds longer to reach 60 mph than does the M3 Competition xDrive, which does the deed in 3.0 seconds.



On the other hand, perhaps due to its lower weight and more balanced weight distribution, the M4 churns out shorter braking distances, higher lateral g's, and nearly identical figure-eight numbers as the M3 Comp. The M4's strong brakes, admirable front-end grip, and willingness to sashay into corners and drift out of them generated real warmth from some judges.

"Granted, you don't need a drift mode in a RWD sports car, but it's entertaining nonetheless," features editor Christian Seabaugh said. "I love the gamification of it, too, giving out stars and suggesting when to pull your foot off the throttle."

Executive editor Mac Morrison noted how easy the car is to drive using the gas pedal. "The M traction control system keeps the rear end loose enough to rotate around corners but also makes it super easy to catch and get it back in a straight line." But as speeds increase or the pavement falls apart, ride quality can deteriorate from planted to pogo stick.

As you can tell, against our criteria, the M4's scorecard is mixed, but most damning is the value equation. A $73,000 base price for a 400-hp German sport coupe won't raise eyebrows, but this M4's $100,895 as-tested price gives us serious pause. That sticker is within $8K of the as-tested price of the faster, vastly more entertaining M3 Competition on hand.

And we didn't even mention the much maligned, oversize twin-kidney grille. "Whereas the M3 Comp delivers a mighty enough punch that I can momentarily forget the way the nose looks, the M4 enjoys no such quarter," deputy editor Alex Stoklosa said.

There is goodness in the base M4 chassis and how it drives, but if you can afford it, get it in Competition spec. There's no point in saving this manual. **Edward Loh**



SPECS	2021 BMW M4
BASE PRICE/AS TESTED	$72,795/$100,895
POWER (SAE NET)	473 hp @ 6,250 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	406 lb-ft @ 2,650 rpm
ACCEL, 0-60 MPH	4.2 sec
QUARTER MILE	12.4 sec @ 117.6 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	101 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	1.05 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	23.4 sec @ 0.86 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB	16/23/19 mpg
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front-engine, RWD, 4-pass, 2-door coupe
ENGINE, TRANSMISSION	3.0L turbo direct-injected DOHC 24-valve I-6, 6-speed manual
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	3,721 lb (52/48%)
WHEELBASE	112.5 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	189.1 x 74.3 x 54.8 in
ON SALE	Now







2022 BMW M5 CS



PROS Ferocious engine • Rowdy handling • Performance and practicality in one
CONS Ridiculous number of settings • Test vehicle used wrong tires • Seats uncomfortable for some

The new BMW M5 CS—for Competition Sport—immediately caught our attention, thanks to the visually stunning combination of its $5,000 Frozen Deep Green Metallic paint and its bronze wheels and grille surround. And once on the move, it was quickly established BMW had delivered the most thrilling M5 in years.

The S63 4.4-liter twin-turbo V-8 makes 627 hp at 6,000 rpm and 553 lb-ft of torque. Peak torque is the same as the regular M5 Competition's, but the CS' maximum power betters the Comp's by 10 and the standard M5's by 27. Snap the throttle open and hang on as monstrous acceleration takes hold, pushing the CS to speeds few other contenders could match on the faster parts of our evaluation circuits.

But this isn't merely a straight-line superstar. It benefits from the M5 Comp's chassis changes, including stiffer engine mounts, a 0.2-inch-lower ride height, more negative front camber, and a stiffer rear anti-roll bar and toe-link ball-joint mounts, plus revised suspension geometry due to its lower weight. Our scales said the M5 CS weighs 4,089 pounds, about 200 fewer than the Comp. The savings come from adopting carbon-fiber-reinforced plastic for the hood, front splitter, mirror caps, rear diffuser, rear spoiler, and engine cover. This M5 also has less sound deadening, and the upgrades add up to a blistering experience on any road.



"Hot damn, this thing is capital-R Rowdy," features editor Scott Evans said. "Everything about it feels fast; it lunges from corner to corner like the Porsche Taycan Turbo S. The power is manic. The steering is super-sharp, with less dulling from the AWD system than I feared. I barely had to move the wheel for the tightest corners." All our drivers also noted how the M5 CS' sharp dynamics make it feel half its size. It only failed to make the finalist cut for two reasons.

The first is an eternal topic of argu—er, cordial debate at *MT* HQ: How much adjustability is too much? "All M cars suffer from having too many modes and settings," features editor Christian Seabaugh said. "You need a calculator to figure out how many combinations of engine, chassis, steering, all-wheel drive, transmission, and traction control settings are available. Just give me one good mode each for sport, track, and road. I don't need this other nonsense." Deputy editor Alex Stoklosa agreed. "How the #$&! do I set up this car properly?" he griped. "Is the car 'better' when the dampers are soft but the throttle response is hyperaggressive? And 'better' compared to what, exactly? Who knows!"



The other reason wasn't BMW's fault. You'd ideally option your M5 CS with the no-cost Pirelli P Zero Corsa ultra-high-performance tires, but supply issues meant BMW could only send the car with Michelin Pilot Sport 4S tires. The PS 4S is a fine chunk of rubber, but the M5 CS needs the Corsas' extra-gooey grip to feel less skittish and more settled. Not that it behaved erratically, but we didn't experience the car at its best, and other contenders inched (barely) ahead as our evaluations wore on. We're dying to try it on the proper tires, but, regardless, the M5 CS represents a massive accomplishment. It's easily one of the best BMWs of the modern era.

Mac Morrison

SPECS	2022 BMW M5 CS
BASE PRICE/AS TESTED	$143,995/$148,995
POWER (SAE NET)	627 hp @ 6,000 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	553 lb-ft @ 1,800 rpm
ACCEL, 0-60 MPH	2.6 sec
QUARTER MILE	10.7 sec @ 129.7 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	101 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	1.04 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	23.2 sec @ 0.92 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB	15/21/17 mpg
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front-engine, AWD, 4-pass, 4-door sedan
ENGINE, TRANSMISSION	4.4L twin-turbo direct-injected DOHC 32-valve 90-degree V-8, 8-speed auto
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	4,089 lb (56/44%)
WHEELBASE	117.4 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	196.4 x 74.9 x 57.8 in
ON SALE	Now





2021 Ford Mustang Mach 1



PROS Looks and sounds great • Handles relatively well for a Mustang • Solid brakes
CONS It's not quite as good as the GT350 • Marginal power gain • Unsettled at high speeds



Ever since the sixth-generation S550 Ford Mustang made its debut with an independent rear suspension as the starring attraction, we've been in and out of love with it. We fell hard for the Shelby cars, specifically the GT350 and 350R, with their screaming Voodoo engine and carbon-fiber wheels, and the absolutely astonishing GT500 was the 760-hp muscled-up Mustang of our dreams. But we haven't been enamored with some of the performance-package Mustang models, several of which aren't as good as similar Chevrolet Camaros.

The 2021 Ford Mustang Mach 1 represents an attempt to merge what we love about the Shelby cars with the best of the Mustang GT models, and after a short affair with Ford's newest pony performer, we found it to be a reasonably compelling proposition.

"If you're a Mustang person, I expect you'll think it looks good, drives good, and sounds good," executive editor Mac Morrison said. "It has more grip than I expected, and you can lean on it pretty darn hard before it really starts to slide around."

Thanks in large part to its MagneRide dampers, a Torsen rear differential, the special Mach 1 handling package featuring a set of Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tires, a crazy "s'wing" rear spoiler/wing cribbed from the GT500, and a stout set of Brembo brakes, this Mustang was up to the task when it came to being driven hard on the track.



"Compared to the standard GT Performance Pack, the Mach 1 is a significantly more interesting car," features editor Christian Seabaugh said. "The biggest problem with those Mustang GTs is the ride—they're oversprung and not well balanced, constantly bounding back and forth from front to rear. The MagneRide dampers seem to cure the issue. The ride is stiff, sure, but it's composed and predictable."

As for its motivation, the Mach 1 is powered by the Mustang GT's Coyote 5.0-liter V-8 engine, bumped up 20 horses to 480 hp with 420 lb-ft of torque, mated to a Tremec six-speed manual. From a powertrain perspective, it's as potent as any Mustang gets right now, short of the GT500.

The manual itself was the subject of quite a bit of chatter among the judges. Some experienced issues with up- and downshifting, while others found the six-speed was one of the better operators at the event. Head of editorial Ed Loh thought it was middle of the pack overall but found it "easy to slam through the gears. It feels indestructible, like a sledgehammer."

Inside and out, the Mach 1 has the type of adornments Mustang fans will adore, including plenty of flair in the form of stripes and badges, along with an aggressive front and rear fascia specific to this model. Inside, you find the same Recaro seats up front as used in the GT350 plus the manual shift knob from the Bullitt version, and you can delete the rear seat if you desire. It all adds up to a car we had fun with but didn't want to commit to.

"The Mach 1 in three words: good, not great," Seabaugh said, succinctly summing up our affection level for Ford's latest macho Mustang. "I like it, but don't love it."

Mike Floyd



SPECS	2021 FORD MUSTANG MACH 1
BASE PRICE/AS TESTED	$55,195/$66,585
POWER (SAE NET)	480 hp @ 7,000 rpm*
TORQUE (SAE NET)	420 lb-ft @ 4,600 rpm*
ACCEL, 0-60 MPH	4.2 sec
QUARTER MILE	12.6 sec @ 113.1 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	96 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	1.05 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	23.7 sec @ 0.82 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB	14/22/17 mpg
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front-engine, RWD, 2-pass, 2-door coupe
ENGINE, TRANSMISSION	5.0L port- and direct-injected DOHC 32-valve 90-degree V-8, 6-speed manual
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	3,830 lb (54/46%)
WHEELBASE	107.1 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	188.5 x 75.4 x 54.3 in
ON SALE	Now

*With 93-octane fuel



Contenders





2021 Ford Mustang Mach-E GT Performance Edition



PROS Quick like a performance EV should be • Oversteers like a Mustang should • Great brakes
CONS Performance Edition is pricey • Quick-charge speed needs to be quicker • Inconsistent responses

No matter the sport, if you look at any Hall of Fame athlete, you'll notice they all have one key trait in common: the ability to perform at a high level consistently. The 2021 Ford Mustang Mach-E GT Performance Edition should take this lesson to heart.

Like any Mustang GT, the top dog of the Mach-E line builds on more pedestrian variants by upgrading the power, brakes, and suspension and adding sportier styling. The standard Mach-E GT has a unique nose that ties it to traditional Mustangs, two upsized permanent-magnet motors—one at each axle—good for a combined 480 hp and 600 lb-ft of torque, Ford's "extended-range" 93.0-kWh battery, larger rotors, a retuned suspension, and 20-inch wheels wrapped in all-season performance tires. The Performance Edition takes things a bit further. Horsepower is unchanged, but torque rises to 634 lb-ft, and the SUV also gets MagneRide dampers, stickier summer rubber, and front Brembo brakes. Range falls by just 10 miles versus the standard Mustang Mach-E GT, down to 260, all for a $5,000 premium. At an as-tested price of $69,800, our example was a similar $5K more than a comparable Tesla Model Y Performance.

At first impressions, the GT Performance Edition faithfully lives up to the pony badge on its nose. It feels quick off the line, has quick steering, and its laissez-faire stability control system allows for a decent and quite fun amount of oversteer. Its brakes are particularly good, too. "The best of any EV I've tested," road test editor Chris Walton said. "They are highly effective and very well tuned for trail-braking, being easy to predict, control, and release."

They're so good, in fact, they encourage you to drive harder, stringing corners together like you would in a "regular" Mustang GT. But then this electric SUV's inconsistency starts to rear its head.

Consistency can also involve being ready when needed. Unfortunately, the Mach-E's peak fast-charge rate—nominally 150 kW—just isn't quick enough to support performance driving, which can quickly drain the battery pack. As the pack fills, the maximum charge rate soon tapers to the low 90-kW range, and then to the low teens once the pack's charge is north of 80 percent, which means reenergizing the vehicle takes far longer than you hope it will (close to an hour), given the fun you're having. This experience is deeply incongruous with the Mach-E GT's mission.

And there may be yet more waiting for fun-seeking drivers, as it takes about 15 minutes for the powertrain-optimizing Unbridled Extend setting to get the battery and motors to ideal temperature for sustained high-performance driving after every charge.

Next, no matter what mode you're in, the massive amount of power you enjoy while tooling around plummets north of 80 mph. Finally, throw a corner or two the Mach-E's way, and it can be damn near impossible to get the Mustang to perform the same way twice. "Entering a tight corner, the Mach-E might take a heavy set on its front outside tire and oversteer," deputy editor Alex Stoklosa said. "Entering the same corner again at the same speed and from the same direction, I experienced gross, unrelenting understeer.



"Provided the Mustang does what you're expecting it to do—behave like a tail-happy, chuckable ball of EV joy—it's fun," Stoklosa continued. Trouble is, this pony just isn't consistent enough to count on. The Mach-E GT makes a good street car, but it's not quite ready to be our Performance Vehicle of the Year.

Christian Seabaugh



SPECS	2021 FORD MUSTANG MACH-E 4X GT
BASE PRICE/AS TESTED	$61,000/$69,800
POWER (SAE NET)	480 hp
TORQUE (SAE NET)	634 lb-ft
ACCEL, 0-60 MPH	3.6 sec
QUARTER MILE	12.6 sec @ 100.6 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	105 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	0.96 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	24.9 sec @ 0.78 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB	88/75/82 mpg-e
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front and rear-motor, AWD, 5-pass, 4-door SUV
ENGINE, TRANSMISSION	2x permanent-magnet electric, 1-speed automatic
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	4,980 lb (50/50%)
WHEELBASE	117.5 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	186.7 x 74.1 x 63.5 in
ON SALE	Now





2022 Honda Civic Si



PROS Six-speed manual is pure joy • Light, tactile handling • Incredible value proposition
CONS Brakes need more staying power • High and vague clutch engagement point • Revs can hang



For the as-tested price of the Lamborghini Huracán STO, you could buy 15-and-a-half Si-badged Honda Civics, the lowest-priced, least powerful, and third-lightest contender that vied for our PVOTY calipers. Did a humble, sub-$30K, front-wheel-drive economy sedan making only 200 horsepower have a chance against all the Black Series/Wings, M's, V's, GTs, and GT3s?

Abso-friggin-lutely.

In fact, many of the supposed shortcomings of the 2022 Honda Civic Si made it stand out in our field of monstrously powered beasts. Subtracting brute force and head-snapping thrust—and much of the associated sound and fury—sharpened our judges' perception of other attributes. "There's something really tactile and raw about the Civic Si that gets me going," director of editorial operations Mike Floyd said. "Its four-cylinder at full chat just sounds so lean and mean."

The Civic Si makes a strong value and fuel economy statement, and the Si's mini-Accord styling adds maturity missing from the previous-generation Civic. Engineering excellence is everywhere you look and touch; every judge called out the light, communicative steering and the "delightful" feel and "super-precise" throws of the Si's six-speed manual transmission, as they extracted all 192 lb-ft from the 1.5-liter turbo inline-four.

"More low-end torque and a longer horsepower peak are exactly what this engine needed,"



features editor Scott Evans said. "The torque makes it nicer to drive at every speed, and the power no longer falls off at the top end."

To be clear, at nearly 15 pounds per hp (more than double the load of some other competitors), the Si is slow, but "Who cares?" was the prevailing sentiment. "It's just so stable and confident in a corner," Evans said. "You just want to drive it faster and faster because it's so rewarding. It's still a momentum car, and that's great because it really makes you work on your driving to get the most out of it."

Amid the pages of notes on all our competitors, the adjectives "authentic," "approachable," and "attainable" were reserved for the Si. It was the performance vehicle everyone could quietly appreciate. "There is something appealing about seeing myself in an Si that makes me like it even more in this competition, which is loaded with vehicles I could never hope to actually own in my lifetime," deputy editor Alex Stoklosa said.

So why wasn't it even a finalist? For one thing, the only other front-driver in the mix, the Hyundai Veloster N, delivered an even more intriguing and irresistible combination of turbo-boosted fun. And there were some blemishes on the Civic Si's otherwise smooth 'n' sporty driving experience. Squishy at first dab, the brakes faded for some judges by the end of the handling course. Although that's a non-factor on the street, it did not bode well for the at-the-limit track sessions the finalists would encounter. Judges also called out the clutch's light pedal and its high and vague engagement point. The engine's tendency to hang onto revs also drew criticism.

For some, the Si just wasn't a big enough step up from the already sublime 11th-generation Civic. Other judges were tantalized but left thirsty for the sharper edge and much-needed power boost promised by the coming Type R. So we shall wait for next year. **Edward Loh**



SPECS	2022 HONDA CIVIC SI
BASE PRICE/AS TESTED	$28,315/$28,515
POWER (SAE NET)	200 hp @ 6,000 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	192 lb-ft @ 1,800 rpm
ACCEL, 0-60 MPH	7.1 sec
QUARTER MILE	15.3 sec @ 92.8 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	110 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	0.93 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	26.3 sec @ 0.67 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB	27/37/31 mpg
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front-engine, FWD, 5-pass, 4-door sedan
ENGINE, TRANSMISSION	1.5L turbo direct-injected DOHC 16-valve I-4, 6-speed manual
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	2,981 lb (59/41%)
WHEELBASE	107.7 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	184.0 x 70.9 x 55.7 in
ON SALE	Now



2021 Porsche 718 Boxster GTS 4.0



PROS Strong, great-sounding engine • Outstanding manual • Your hat stays on top-down at 120 mph
CONS Doesn't handle as well as expected • Somewhat odd gearing • We know it can be better

Let's take a trip back to 2016, even if Porsche diehards would prefer we didn't. That's when the company introduced the fourth-generation Boxster, now with a 718 prefix and (cue the loyalists' gags) turbocharged flat-four engine offerings in place of the naturally aspirated flat-sixes that had powered every version of the popular and much-lauded roadster since it first arrived 20 years earlier.

The new engines were among the best four-bangers in history, but nevertheless, cries never ceased for a reversion to the old. So while other 718 Boxsters carry on with the 2.0- and 2.5-liter turbocharged units, the prior 2.5-liter 718 GTS that lasted a scant two model years in the U.S. (2018 and 2019) is gone. Instead, the new 982-series 718 Boxster GTS 4.0-liter gives many of us what we've wanted: a new flat-six. The engine itself is a punched-out, free-breathing derivation of the 3.0-liter twin-turbo 9A2 flat-six family found in every non-GT and non-Turbo 991.2 and today's 992 911s. It makes 394 hp and 309 lb-ft of torque, figures that represent an increase of 44 hp compared to the 2.5 turbo still found in regular Boxsters, with the same amount of torque.

Other items of note: The GTS 4.0 adds thicker anti-roll bars, recalibrated PASM dampers, upgraded chassis mounts, slightly larger brakes, and upgraded wheels. Along with the larger engine and extra standard features like heated seats and dynamic lights, it boasts Porsche Torque Vectoring with a mechanical limited-slip differential. However, the car adds roughly 145 pounds compared to the old GTS 2.5, weighing 3,173 pounds on our scales.

Contrary to what we expected heading into PVOTY, though, the overall package didn't blow away our judges.

"I'm whelmed," features editor Scott Evans said. "I expected to love this car, and I'm kind of meh on it. I know Porsche can do better with this chassis. It's the damping that surprised me; it doesn't soak up midcorner bumps as well as I expected, and it feels a little skittery at high speeds. Porsches are usually more locked down, and as a result, I couldn't carry as much speed through fast, bumpy sweepers as I could in lesser cars. I was 8 mph faster in the Subaru.

"But what a fantastic shifter," Evans continued. "It's just perfect in movement and feel. Sucks about the super-long second gear, though. I kept wanting to take extra laps to see if I was doing something wrong. I felt like I could learn to drive the car better if I just kept trying, even though I knew some of the issues really didn't have anything to do with my driving."

Senior features editor Jonny Lieberman agreed. "Evans is right," he said. "The Boxster GTS is good, but it isn't great. The long second gear makes things a little confusing, and it just doesn't handle as well as we expected it to."

The fact we can say this about such a capable machine that's long been a favorite speaks volumes about just what a stupendous level of performance modern sports cars have reached. As features editor Christian Seabaugh said, "Other than the noted 'complaints,' it's an excellent car. Well balanced, poised, and easy to drive fast and find your limit. The steering is sharp and direct, and the brakes are pretty good."

In the end, although the 718 GTS 4.0 is a great Boxster, it isn't yet quite as outstanding as we know it can be. **Mac Morrison**





SPECS	2021 PORSCHE 718 BOXSTER GTS 4.0
BASE PRICE/AS TESTED	$90,250/$100,000
POWER (SAE NET)	394 hp @ 7,000 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	309 lb-ft @ 5,000 rpm
ACCEL, 0-60 MPH	4.2 sec
QUARTER MILE	12.4 sec @ 115.9 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	99 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	1.07 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	23.6 sec @ 0.87 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB	17/24/19 mpg
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Mid-engine, RWD, 2-pass, 2-door conv
ENGINE, TRANSMISSION	4.0L direct-injected DOHC 24-valve flat-6, 6-speed manual
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	3,173 lb (45/55%)
WHEELBASE	97.4 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	172.4 x 70.9 x 49.7 in
ON SALE	Now





2022 Porsche Taycan Turbo S

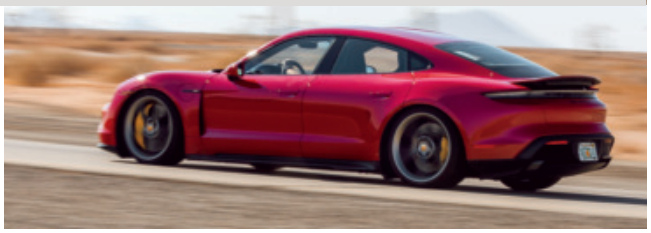


PROS Catapult acceleration • Near perfect driving controls • Lives up to name and badge
CONS Unnatural brake feel • Weight is the enemy • Pushes back when pushed

There were more than a few nudges and snickers when Porsche first announced that its Taycan electric sports car would wear the Turbo S badge, despite, you know, not actually having an exhaust-gas-driven compressor for the engine it also doesn't have.

We forgot all about the joke right after our first test of the Taycan Turbo S, after which it (briefly) held the title of quickest vehicle we've tested. After a few blasts in the 2022 Taycan Turbo S we had at Performance Vehicle of the Year, we're flat-out laughing in delight. "Ridiculously quick!" senior features editor Jonny Lieberman said. "Rockets up to 120 mph in the blink of an eye, and it's very happy once it's there."

Pure speed isn't all the Taycan Turbo S delivers. Plop yourself into the driver's seat, and it immediately becomes clear you're in a Porsche first, an electric vehicle second. This is not a science fair project that happens to go ludicrously quick, but a purpose-built driving machine that just happens to be electric-powered. "Great seats. The steering wheel is about perfect. The driving position is excellent," executive editor Mac Morrison said.



From that position comes leverage and grip. "What a chassis," features editor Scott Evans said. "It completely takes advantage of its inherent low center of gravity. The Taycan Turbo S is totally planted and moves around your hip point. It absolutely drives like a Porsche."

The ride and handling compromise is also familiar and familial; Porsche dialed its famed taut smoothness into the electronically controlled dampers, whether you're in Normal, Sport, or Sport+ mode. The Taycan Turbo S is always poised and ready to go.

But as good as this electric Turbo S is, it's not perfect. And the two older brothers we had at the test were better. The way the Cayenne Turbo GT and 911 GT3 nailed our performance of intended function criterion made it hard for our judges to advance a third Weissach wunderkind to the finalist round, especially one with a few glaring flaws.

Unnatural-feeling brakes and understeer were the two most common complaints—and symptoms of the Taycan's corpulence. No amount of fancy torque vectoring can hide 5,129 pounds, making this by far the heaviest Porche we've weighed with the Turbo S badge.

"With a car this quick, you can use a FWD driving technique, which is to scrub off all the speed before you get to the corner, and then rocket out with all this grunt," Lieberman said. "But the brakes really struggle. And on the tight stuff, the Turbo S goes into understeer, which very few cars at this event exhibit. It's just too heavy."

Weight has long been the enemy of high-performance machines. It's a particularly vexing problem for EV manufacturers. But once battery technology breaks through and adding lightness to EVs begins—watch out.

"The future is bright," Evans said. "Electric sports cars can and will be awesome." And Porsche will build them. Just as the first 911 Turbo was the benchmark for all sports cars that came after, this first-generation Taycan Turbo S sets the bar for electrified performance cars. **Edward Loh**



SPECS	2022 PORSCHE TAYCAN TURBO S
BASE PRICE/AS TESTED	$186,350/$208,820
POWER (SAE NET)	750 hp
TORQUE (SAE NET)	774 lb-ft
ACCEL, 0–60 MPH	2.4 sec
QUARTER MILE	10.3 sec @ 133.3 mph
BRAKING, 60–0 MPH	104 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	0.98 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	23.6 sec @ 0.86 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB	67/68/68 mpg-e
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front- and rear-motor, AWD, 4-pass, 4-door sedan
ENGINE, TRANSMISSION	Permanent-magnet electric, 1-speed auto (front), 2-speed auto (rear)
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	5,129 lb (49/51%)
WHEELBASE	114.2 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	195.4 x 77.4 x 54.3 in
ON SALE	Now







2022 Subaru BRZ



PROS Affordable, especially in this field • Superb driver's car • Its mere existence
CONS Could use a smidge more power • Noisy in the cabin

If you're an overthinker, the 2022 Subaru BRZ and 2022 Toyota GR86 are not the cars for you. These two small rear-drive sports cars have the same chassis, same engine, and same transmission, and they roll off the same factory line. The differences amount to a couple hundred bucks and some minor suspension tweaks, exterior visual differences, and interior trim bits. So how do you choose? And how will you know if you made the right choice?

Truth is, you could just flip a coin, because either way you're going to be left wondering: What if?

The new BRZ and GR86 are both heavily revised versions of the 2012–2020 BRZ and Scion FR-S/Toyota 86. The pair gets an updated platform that's 50 percent stiffer than before, plus more aggressive rubber and, most important, a new, more powerful 2.4-liter flat-four that produces its 228 hp and 184 lb-ft of torque





in a more linear fashion than before. Both cars come standard with a six-speed manual and are available with an afterthought six-speed automatic. Do yourself a favor and skip the auto.

The key differences between the Toyota and Subaru amount to the speed they're capable of and how well they rotate. On the former front, the GR86 was inexplicably quicker to 60 mph (5.8 seconds to the Subaru's 5.9) in our testing and a full second faster around the figure eight, lapping the course in 24.7 seconds at 0.76 g average, versus the BRZ's 25.7 seconds at 0.71 g average. This performance difference largely explains why the GR86 advanced to the finalist round and the BRZ went home.

But what if?

The reason the Toyota is quicker around the figure eight is because it has sharper front-end bite and a rear end that's constantly on the verge of stepping out into a big, pretty drift—a boon on tight roads where you're frequently changing directions. The BRZ, on the other hand, is more planted and stable, really coming alive on the types of corners you'd see at a track day. In other words, the Toyota embraces sliding, whereas the Subaru is about sticking.

That led more than one judge to question if the BRZ should've joined us in our finalist round on Angeles Crest Highway and at the Streets of Willow over the GR86, whose squirreliness was less appreciated in those scenarios.

But even if we had brought the BRZ along, we have a sneaking suspicion the flaws that (spoiler alert) sank the Toyota would have held the BRZ back, too. The new flat-four, for instance, while worlds better than the engine it replaces, remains agricultural, and with a chassis this good, it still leaves us pining for more power. NVH—hardly a concern for most sports car buyers—could be improved, as well, especially considering the engine isn't all that pleasant to hear. (At least it's easy to drown out by cranking the stereo and dropping the windows.) The shifter is classic Subaru: long and notchy but still somehow capable of direct throws. You either love it or you don't.

The better solution, we found, to the mindless spinning of the anxious, indecisive brain, is to not engage. Instead, shut up, grab the keys to a Toyobaru, crank it on, dump the clutch, and enjoy—you're alive, after all, aren't you?

Christian Seabaugh



SPECS	2022 SUBARU BRZ
BASE PRICE/AS TESTED	$28,955/$31,455
POWER (SAE NET)	228 hp @ 7,000 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	184 lb-ft @ 3,700 rpm
ACCEL, 0–60 MPH	5.9 sec
QUARTER MILE	14.3 sec @ 99.8 mph
BRAKING, 60–0 MPH	107 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	0.93 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	25.7 sec @ 0.71 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB	20/27/22 mpg
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front-engine, RWD, 4-pass, 2-door coupe
ENGINE, TRANSMISSION	2.4L port- and direct-injected DOHC 16-valve flat-4, 6-speed manual
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	2,822 lb (56/44%)
WHEELBASE	101.4 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	167.9 x 69.9 x 51.6 in
ON SALE	Now





2022 Volkswagen Golf R



PROS Unfazed by high speeds • DSG transmission makes the car more fun • Still a solid hot hatch
CONS Doesn't really thrill you • Less engaging than the previous model • Aggravating capacitive controls



Volkswagen's new Golf R faced an uphill battle heading into this Performance Vehicle of the Year showdown. After all, we previously evaluated both it and the new GTI as part of the 2022 *MotorTrend* Car of the Year contest, and despite the car generating some enthusiasm among our judges, we uncovered a few major issues.

For one, there's too much understeer in the all-wheel-drive Golf R's handling repertoire, and we also disliked that the six-speed manual version's clutch engagement point was difficult to locate. But the car's multitude of capacitive controls irked us even more, making for aggravating interactions and at times causing us to trigger some of the controls on the steering wheel while driving hard. Simply put, the unnecessarily added "technofluff," as we called it in our COTY report, greatly annoyed just about every judge who drove the R.

In bringing the Golf R back for PVOTY, there was no way to avoid the irritating controls. But from a mechanical standpoint, this time we tested the seven-speed DSG automatic model with paddle shifters. Would eliminating the finicky clutch pedal make the Golf R feel even more eager and nimble and move it closer to the front of the field in the context of the year's best *performance* car?

Features editor Scott Evans, who wasn't among this year's COTY judges but was on the PVOTY panel, observed that the Golf R needs to be driven like a front-wheel-drive-only car. "Get all your braking done ahead of the corner, be delicate going to the throttle to balance, then lay the hammer down after the apex," he said. "Then it gets some of its all-wheel-drive mojo going and shoots out of the corner—but, again, don't floor it too soon. Get the throttle timing wrong, and you'll get mild understeer through the exit.

"It still seems like a pretty good car to me, but I must agree this Golf R just doesn't feel special like the old version," he continued. "It's more mature and more composed, but a bit stuffy. It's lost all its raucous character. Instead, it's very smooth and confident when driving fast on the winding road course [at Hyundai's proving ground], and it really feels like a grown-up sports car. Volkswagen engineered all the sloppiness out, which is good—but also all the personality. But this car's biggest problem is that the faster, more fun-to-drive Hyundai Veloster N is here."

Our judges found the DSG gearbox indeed makes the car a bit better, as ditching the imperfectly tuned clutch pedal allows you to apply maximum braking while downshifting far more easily. And those of us who left-foot brake found we could manipulate the car's weight more precisely than we could with the manual, mitigating the understeer via chassis rotation. This made the R more satisfying to drive than its manual sibling, but none of our evaluators came anywhere close to describing it as stupefyingly fun.

And when we're talking about performance vehicles, there's no advancing to our finalist round if big grins aren't an inherent part of the package.

Mac Morrison



SPECS	2022 VOLKSWAGEN GOLF R
BASE PRICE/AS TESTED	$44,640/$45,440
POWER (SAE NET)	315 hp @ 5,600 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	295 lb-ft @ 3,000 rpm
ACCEL, 0–60 MPH	4.2 sec
QUARTER MILE	12.8 sec @ 108.7 mph
BRAKING, 60–0 MPH	109 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	0.94 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	24.8 sec @ 0.77 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB	23/30/26 mpg
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front-engine, AWD, 5-pass, 4-door hatchback
ENGINE, TRANSMISSION	2.0L turbo direct-injected DOHC 16-valve I-4, 7-speed twin-clutch auto
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	3,445 lb (61/39%)
WHEELBASE	103.5 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	168.9 x 70.4 x 57.7 in
ON SALE	Now



Finalists



2022 BMW M3 Competition





PROS Engine apparently runs on Tannerite • Balanced chassis • Stupid quick
CONS Too many drive mode settings for some • AWD adds some heft • That face

There are two places where you'll probably never catch a glimpse of the new BMW M3's garish front end: from its driver's seat and, for anyone sharing the road with one, from another car. Why? Because it'll take some fairly exotic machinery to keep up with, let alone pass, the M3 Competition.

Even when the M3 is coming at you, it'll streak by so fast, those nostrils will blur into wider shapes that recall BMW's kidney grilles of yore. Whatever your thoughts about it, BMW did ensure the M3's sniffing schnoz shovels a ton of air into the engine bay, where its fierce 3.0-liter twin-turbo inline-six lies.

BMW says the engine produces 503 hp and 479 lb-ft of torque. But man, it seems like there's no way this I-6 punches below 600 hp. Equipped with BMW's xDrive AWD, the M3 Competition we tested shoots to 60 mph in 3 seconds flat. The quarter mile is dispatched in 11.1 seconds at 124.7 mph. That's Porsche and performance electric vehicle territory.

The 630-hp Lamborghini Huracán STO bests it by just two tenths to 60 (2.8 seconds), and the advantage of the 720-hp Mercedes-AMG GT Black Series is even slimmer. How can we reconcile that the M3, despite loading each horse with 7.8 pounds, somehow keeps up with those supercars, which carry 5.1–5.4 pounds per hp? We can't. Historically, BMW has underrated its beefier engines, but this is egregious.

As features editor Christian Seabaugh said, "It's just hilariously unhinged." There's a drive mode where power is only sent to the rear axle, with predictable results. But you needn't activate the RWD setting for lurid oversteer. Forget chucking it into a corner; you can just as easily induce drifts by pressing harder on the gas with the steering wheel turned. BMW's xDrive sends so much engine torque to the rear wheels that you'd swear the car is rear drive.

Speaking of, compared to the rear-drive M3 Comp he previously drove, senior features editor Jonny Lieberman bemoaned the heft, which he swore the M3's AWD gear added to the front axle. Indeed, some judges found it necessary to lift off the gas or dab the brakes to get the mass to transfer to the front for optimal turn-in, especially on the Streets of Willow Springs—a behavior Lieberman insisted was the result of the extra pounds the car carries up front. But without a rear-drive variant for comparison, most didn't find it disqualifying.

More noticeable are the personality shifts from the previous M3 to this one. Gone is the sensation that the M3 tries to pummel the earth into submission with its overly firm suspension and heavy controls. In its place is a pleasant new delicacy to its dynamics. The suspension seems to have more travel and compliance, the body is allowed to roll and pitch slightly rather than remaining stiffly dead-level at all times, and even in the sportiest modes its steering is almost light.

This smidge of movement lends the M3 a more natural feel, and you can detect where you are in its grip envelope by dint of the body lean. Our shoulders like the transition to the less weighty steering, which, along with the suspension's newly up-on-its-toes feel, gives the car a furtiveness to its responses that's nearly Alfa Romeo–like.

This harmonic lightness let several editors settle into a satisfying, fast-paced flow. On the Angeles Crest portion of our evaluation, where the M3 changed several judges' minds, Lieberman kept pace with features editor Scott Evans driving the fairly exotic AMG GT Black Series. Of the two, only Evans could spot the M3's awful nose—in his mirrors—as it bore down on his 720-hp über-sled.

Alexander Stoklosa



SPECS	2022 BMW M3 COMPETITION xDRIVE
BASE PRICE/AS TESTED	$77,895/$108,545
POWER (SAE NET)	503 hp @ 6,250 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	479 lb-ft @ 2,750 rpm
ACCEL, 0–60 MPH	3.0 sec
QUARTER MILE	11.1 sec @ 124.7 mph
BRAKING, 60–0 MPH	105 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	1.03 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	23.3 sec @ 0.89 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB	16/22/18 mpg
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front-engine, AWD, 5-pass, 4-door sedan
ENGINE, TRANSMISSION	3.0L twin-turbo direct-injected DOHC 24-valve I-6, 8-speed automatic
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	3,899 lb (54/46%)
WHEELBASE	112.5 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	189.1 x 74.3 x 56.4 in
ON SALE	Now



Finalists



2022 Cadillac CT4-V Blackwing





PROS Brakes strong enough to slow the Earth • Performance Traction Management • Superb chassis
CONS Low redline • Sounds a bit like poo • Knowing that a V-8 might make it perfect



It's hard not to get a sense of déjà vu from the 2022 Cadillac CT4-V Blackwing. Ostensibly a new M3-fighting compact luxury sport sedan, the CT4-V Blackwing looks and drives much like a mildly updated Cadillac ATS-V. Question is—is that a bad thing?

In a word, no.

The old ATS-V was one of our favorite compact luxury sport sedans, thanks to its superb chassis dynamics, great steering, and driver's car feel. Its imperfections—mostly centered around its 3.6-liter twin-turbo V-6—held it back from toppling the likes of the Alfa Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio and Mercedes-AMG C 63 in comparison tests against its segment peers.

Moving beyond the fact that this is a new-generation vehicle with a new name, Cadillac made only subtle changes to the CT4-V Blackwing over the ATS-V in an effort to take down the European heavyweights. Tuning and intake changes give the carryover V-6 a modest 8-horsepower boost, up to 472 hp, while torque remains unchanged at 445 lb-ft. The six-speed manual also carries over, but our test car was fitted with the new 10-speed automatic, which Cadillac says shifts quicker than the eight-speed it replaces. Other changes include the addition of the fourth generation of Delphi's MagneRide shocks, GM's latest Performance Traction Management (PTM) system, and optional new carbon-fiber diffusers that are said to reduce lift by 214 percent—a somewhat meaningless yet still somehow impressive figure.

It all combines to make the CT4-V Blackwing an incredibly impressive package. "You know it's a great car when you can go hard on your warmup lap and flat-out on the first hot lap," features editor Scott Evans said. The Caddy is an incredibly confidence-inspiring car. Its chassis—GM's Alpha 2, shared with the CT5 and Chevrolet Camaro—is among the best rear-drive platforms on the planet. Lightweight, composed, and well balanced, it's augmented by heavy but quick steering and those otherworldly MagneRide dampers.

The PTM system waits in the wings should anything go awry. No longer buried in traction control menus, PTM is now controllable via a thumb switch on the steering wheel. "It's easy to forget how good PTM really is," deputy editor Alex Stoklosa said. "I got into a big ol' oopsie—I'm talking full brown note for a second—and even at a ridiculous angle, instead of the computers making things worse when I got on the gas, there was seemingly no intervention beyond my steering input and a boot full of throttle."

The CT4-V Blackwing might have inherited the ATS-V's best traits, but sadly it has also been saddled with its worst ones, namely Cadillac's twin-turbo V-6, which is forgettable at best. It makes decent power, but it's uninspiring to wring out, its low 6,500-rpm redline and trucky exhaust note chipping away at what little joy there is to be had. The new 10-speed automatic is pretty good, but it doesn't downshift as quickly as the automatics in some of its rivals, and it can be slurry at times.

Our big request when we first drove the ATS-V was for Cadillac to fit one of GM's V-8s under the hood. Seven years later, our wish remains the same. The 2022 Cadillac CT4-V Blackwing is a car that's two cylinders shy of perfection. Maybe next time. Or given Cadillac's promise to go fully electric by 2030, more likely never.

Christian Seabaugh

SPECS	2022 CADILLAC CT4-V BLACKWING
BASE PRICE/AS TESTED	$59,900/$80,235
POWER (SAE NET)	472 hp @ 5,750 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	445 lb-ft @ 3,500 rpm
ACCEL, 0-60 MPH	4.0 sec
QUARTER MILE	12.4 sec @ 114.0 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	106 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	1.05 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	23.8 sec @ 0.84 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB	16/24/19 mpg
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front-engine, RWD, 5-pass, 4-door sedan
ENGINE, TRANSMISSION	3.6L twin-turbo direct-injected DOHC 24-valve 60-degree V-6, 10-speed auto
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	3,888 lb (53/47%)
WHEELBASE	109.3 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	187.6 x 71.4 x 56.0 in
ON SALE	Now



2022 Cadillac CT5-V Blackwing





PROS Supercharged power wallop • Fantastic chassis control • Excellent six-speed manual transmission
CONS Complicated performance modes • Feels big at times on a small track • Very thirsty

There's a scene in the movie *Mad Max* where Max gazes upon a blown V-8, whining and roaring in the engine bay of a Pursuit Special as the mechanic maniacally exclaims: "It's the last of the V-8s!" We couldn't help but replay that clip in our minds as we hammered the CT5-V Blackwing around the Hyundai Proving Ground and later as a finalist on Angeles Crest Highway and the Streets of Willow circuit. We're not in some dystopian future, yet here is the last of Cadillac's supercharged V-8 superheroes, a stupendous, 668-hp sendoff to the marque's high-performance V-series cars.

"What a shame Cadillac is going to stop making monstrous supercharged track machines like this," senior features editor Jonny Lieberman said. "It just feels so good to drive. Let's call the big Blackwing bittersweet. And awesome!"

The rest of the judges were as effusive in their praise, lathering



love on the CT5-V Blackwing for its composed chassis—thanks in part to GM's excellent magnetic ride control—and its exceptional, stout brakes. (Our test car had the $9,000 carbon-ceramics.) And we can't forget the six-speed manual and its no-lift-shift feature; the gearbox garnered plenty of judge fan mail (and more all-caps exclamations) and is a novelty on a performance sedan these days.

"Great manual transmission," features editor Christian Seabaugh said. "It's one of the best ones here. Short, precise throws with just enough assist to ensure you never miss your gate, but not enough to make the shifter feel springy. Good clutch feel, well-spaced pedals."

Although it's on the heavy side at 4,067 pounds, the CT5-V Blackwing still lays down some impressive performance numbers. It rumbles to 60 mph in 3.6 seconds and on to a quarter-mile time of 11.5 seconds at 127.5 mph, and it reels itself in from 60 mph in 102 feet.

"Power, power, power, and a boatload of torque, too," Lieberman said. "I barely needed to shift gears on the Crest, as a tsunami of torque [659 lb-ft] was flooding the joint. You quickly notice this is a large sedan with a massive rear seat. That said, the suspension does its part, and the body control is surprisingly solid."

Indeed, it was hard to find any real flaws with the CT5-V from a performance perspective. A few judges thought the car felt big at times on Streets, but only in the sense it would have fit better on a larger track where you could take more advantage of its prodigious power. That, and editorial boss Ed Loh wasn't enamored with what he considered the car's over-configurability. "Like BMW, all the modes are entirely too complicated to navigate," Loh said. "It's dumb to be left wondering if, among the many combinations, you're in the right mode for the conditions." Oh, and it flat-out swills gas.

After our evaluation, however, there was zero question the Blackwing's capabilities are immense, the result of two decades of honing and harnessing a front-engine, rear-drive super sedan formula. Max would no doubt approve.

And although it's a drag this is the last of the supercharged V-8s, the CT5-V finishing third in the inaugural Performance Vehicle of the Year bodes well for Cadillac's high-performance future—electrified though it may be.

Mike Floyd

SPECS	2022 CADILLAC CT5-V BLACKWING
BASE PRICE/AS TESTED	$84,990/$112,545
POWER (SAE NET)	668 hp @ 6,500 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	659 lb-ft @ 3,600 rpm
ACCEL, 0-60 MPH	3.6 sec
QUARTER MILE	11.5 sec @ 127.5 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	102 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	1.04 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	23.4 sec @ 0.89 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB	13/21/15 mpg
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front-engine, RWD, 5-pass, 4-door sedan
ENGINE, TRANSMISSION	6.2L supercharged direct-injected OHV 16-valve 90-degree V-8, 6-speed manual
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	4,067 lb (54/46%)
WHEELBASE	116.0 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	194.9 x 74.1 x 56.5 in
ON SALE	Now



Finalists



2021 Hyundai Veloster N





PROS More refined handling • Excellent dual-clutch transmission • Bargain price
CONS Brakes need more cooling for track work • Unnecessarily complicated performance customization screen • Way too stiff in anything but Comfort mode



The first and potentially last of its kind, the 2021 Hyundai Veloster N carries great meaning behind its performance. It's both a mission statement for the nascent N performance subbrand and a living example of how quickly this new division learns, adapts, and grows.

The only Veloster you can buy anymore, the Veloster N has evolved remarkably in its short life. The first N of any kind available in the U.S., the 2019 model was a bit of a wild child. It had the right pieces—the power and grip and braking—but it was raw and unrefined. It rode far too stiffly and slid around when it could've kept gripping. Man, was it fun, though.

It's amazing what two years can do. Running changes have made the Veloster N a more sophisticated hot hatch without neutering its personality. The car feels more tied down now, less jolted by rough pavement and more disposed to keep its rear tires planted. You can still unload the rear end and force the car to rotate and even drift off-throttle, but you have to be deliberate. When you don't want that, the car digs in and goes.

As much as we prefer a good manual transmission, we have to admit the new dual-clutch automatic suits the Veloster N quite well. Both the ratios and the instantaneous gear changes go a long way toward making the car feel even quicker and more powerful. We're less enamored of its unnecessary artificial gear slamming when driving in a straight line. The stick shift remains available and is a distinguishing factor between this N and the new Kona N crossover, which is DCT-only.

Similarly, we find the sportier modes too harsh for the road and almost too much for the track. In both cases, the N people have made it clear they don't care what we think because their customers apparently enjoy being beaten up by the Veloster. We're thankful for the N Custom mode, which allows us to put the dampers in Comfort and the steering in Normal while dialing up the throttle and transmission response and dialing down the stability control.

The customization would be nicer if it were easier to do, though. Hyundai got too cute with the N Custom screen, which presents as a spider graph with tiny, movable dots for each level of every parameter's adjustability. It's visually interesting but needlessly difficult to adjust on the fly. Set it up once (when parked) and then never touch it again.

We also wish the brake pedal didn't feel wooden. Good for most of its travel, the pedal goes stiff and lifeless as you approach the ABS threshold, giving you the false impression you've already run out of additional stopping power.

Worse, the brakes don't hold up to track work despite the car's Nürburgring development. After three hard laps, the stoppers overheated and faded. Because the electronically controlled limited-slip differential apparently isn't enough, the car also uses its brakes to help pull itself into a corner, thus overworking them. For track use, it just plain needs more brake cooling.

Why the differential needs brake assist is beyond us. It's a great bit of kit. Once you've braked, weighted up the nose, and turned into the corner, you can stand on the throttle, and the diff pulls you out every time. Even if you're sloppy on the entry, you can paper over it with the throttle.

With the previously optional Performance package now standard along with new lightweight sport seats, the price has climbed. Still, at about $35,000, it's a hell of a performance bargain. If this is to be the final Veloster, it's a wonderful note to go out on. **Scott Evans**

SPECS	2021 HYUNDAI VELOSTER N
BASE PRICE/AS TESTED	$33,525/$35,025
POWER (SAE NET)	275 hp @ 6,000 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	260 lb-ft @ 1,450 rpm
ACCEL, 0-60 MPH	5.1 sec
QUARTER MILE	13.7 sec @ 102.9 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	114 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	0.97 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	24.7 sec @ 0.76 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB	20/27/22 mpg
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front-engine, FWD, 4-pass, 3-door hatchback
ENGINE, TRANSMISSION	2.0L turbo direct-injected DOHC 16-valve I-4, 8-speed twin-clutch auto
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	3,159 lb (65/35%)
WHEELBASE	104.3 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	167.9 x 71.3 x 54.9 in
ON SALE	Now





2021 Lamborghini Huracán STO





PROS Near limitless grip • Quicker-than-you-can-think responses • Biblical brakes
CONS Unintuitive drive modes • No performance auto-shifting mode • Needs a bigger shift light

It's not often a car comes along where the only thing you can find to complain about are the names, functions, and number of the drive modes, but here we are. The 2021 Lamborghini Huracán STO is so insanely good to drive, we're left with the nittiest nits to pick.

"You look at the STO and its wings 'n' things," deputy editor Alex Stoklosa said, "then consider that it's shoving a V-10's worth of power to only the rear wheels, and you assume it'll be hairier than a barbershop floor. Not at all. There is so much grip, and the chassis is so balanced, that it drives nothing like it looks. There is no evil here. Sure, the Lambo hustles in ways most cars don't or can't, but it simply has no vices while furiously raging."

You could call it a complaint for lack of others, but the amount of time some judges felt they needed to fully understand the car's limits was a bit longer than usual, simply because the limits are so high you need a telescope to see them.



Once you truly understand what it's capable of, though, you never want to stop driving it. On the street, on the track, it doesn't matter.

Credit the brilliant blending of adaptive magnetorheological shocks, rear steering, racing brakes, and Bridgestone Potenza Race tires for the STO's direct connection to your brain's pleasure center. The front end changes direction quicker than you can think it while the rear stays behind you no matter the speed unless you very deliberately kick it out. When you do, the car breaks away beautifully, allowing you to ride that slip into the perfect amount of rotation.

Mostly, though, it just goes. The damn near race-spec V-10 delivers a perfectly progressive powerband that never wallops the rear tires with more torque than they can handle (which is, admittedly, a lot), so you can stand on the throttle leaving every corner, and the STO will grab and go. Get to the next turn, and the brakes require only gentle but deliberate pressure to stop the car like you just grabbed the No. 3 wire on an aircraft carrier.

Not just a one-lap pony, the Huracán STO will do it over and over, every corner, every lap, all day long. It's simply a hugely rewarding and fulfilling car to drive. You can't automatically say these things about every mid-engine supercar with 600-plus hp.

About those nits. Some judges found the drive modes confusing, assuming STO mode would be the most aggressive. ("STO" stands for "Super Trofeo Omologato," meaning this is the road version of the track-only Super Trofeo.) But STO is actually the "around town" mode, and many felt it was way too docile. Corsa is the mode you want, but keep in mind it's the full race mode with manual-only shifting and reduced stability control. Several judges found themselves wishing for an intermediate mode with lighter steering than Corsa and far more aggressive automatic shifting. Alas, the only other mode is Pioggia, the wet weather mode.

Since we're whining, an actual shift light instead of the graphics in the digital instrument cluster would be nice. The engine just revs forever, right until it suddenly doesn't, so you need the upshift indication in Corsa.

But again, all you really need to know about how awesome this car is to drive is that we can't find anything better to complain about. The Huracán STO is an apex predator at its apex, fully bestowing the thrill of the hunt to anyone who slips behind the wheel. **Scott Evans**

SPECS	2021 LAMBORGHINI HURACÁN STO
BASE PRICE/AS TESTED	$333,633/$442,033
POWER (SAE NET)	630 hp @ 8,000 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	417 lb-ft @ 6,500 rpm
ACCEL, 0-60 MPH	2.8 sec
QUARTER MILE	10.7 sec @ 132.3 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	95 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	1.16 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	22.3 sec @ 0.99 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB	13/18/15 mpg
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Mid-engine, RWD, 2-pass, 2-door coupe
ENGINE, TRANSMISSION	5.2L port- and direct-injected DOHC 40-valve 90-deg V-10, 7-sp twin-clutch auto
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	3,390 lb (42/58%)
WHEELBASE	103.1 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	179.0 x 76.6 x 48.0 in
ON SALE	Now



Finalists





2021 Mercedes-AMG GT Black Series





PROS Monstrous V-8 power • Ferocious reflexes • Mind-bending grip and brakes
CONS Too much car for most roads • Too much car for some *tracks* • Attracts bears

"A bear ran into Stoklosa." Imagine my surprise when, at approximately 7:15 a.m., a quarter hour after all nine Performance Vehicle of the Year finalists were supposed to have met at a predetermined spot on Angeles Crest Highway, my query about why the mighty Mercedes-AMG GT Black Series was late returned that answer. Yes, friends, fellow judge Alex Stoklosa managed to tangle with a bear. "It wasn't a big bear," I was assured. "He'll be here in a minute." Right, carry on.

Joking aside (the bear barely glanced off the car, only knocking off the passenger-side aerodynamic dive plane before running off into the woods), this AMG is a beastly beast. The 4.0-liter twin-turbo flat-plane-crank V-8 produces 720 hp and 590 lb-ft of torque. As features editor Scott Evans pointed out, "That's almost one Honda Civic Si per liter. Feels like you're hitting the NOS bottle in a *Fast & Furious* movie." That



stupendous power is fed through a carbon-fiber driveshaft to a seven-speed dual-clutch transaxle that's been given a tune compared to how other AMG GTs shift. As head of editorial Ed Loh said, "This transmission is fantastic."

AMG threw every racing trick in the book at the GT Black Series. The glass is lighter. Carbon fiber is strewn everywhere, including a 328-foot thread tying together the transmission's metal fastening points. There's a wing on the wing. As international bureau chief Angus MacKenzie said after attending the Black's launch, "It's a race car for the road." This is both great and also, weirdly, not so great. On the winding road at the Hyundai Proving Ground, the GT Black was by far the most impressive car we drove. Best handling? Sweetest? To some, not others, but *mein gott* were we collectively floored by how athletic and dominant this machine is.

"No competitor here gets from point to point this fast," Evans said. "Few other cars do, period." The praise kept coming. My own notes included comments like, "This thing is stacked. The Black Series is racy, angry, absurd, cruel; I'm sure it spits and is missing teeth." I was just getting warmed up.

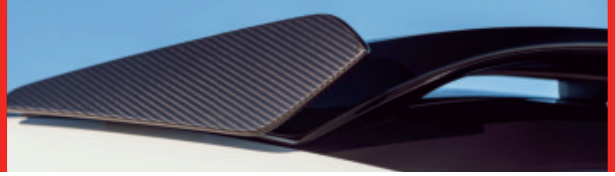
"Just explosively powerful, but controlled, but grip, but wonderful, but the brakes are fabulous. I think it's better than the Lamborghini STO. Much quicker, that's for sure."

My tune changed considerably once we got to an actual road, as did others'. We found it difficult to keep the GT in a single lane. Your typical racetrack is about 40 feet wide, whereas one lane on real roads is 12 feet. That's a big difference. It seems like because the GT Black Series was designed to set the lap record at the Nürburgring Nordschleife—which it did—not quite enough attention was paid to its street manners. As executive editor Mac Morrison said, "On Angeles Crest, it was the least nimble of the three big-wing cars here." True dat.

Also true was that the AMG struggled on the track. Streets of Willow is just too puny for it. The speeds were too low, and the aero never got a chance to do its thing; the GT was like a great white shark in a kiddie pool. "The Nürburgring is definitely where this AMG wants to live, breathe, and eat the tarmac right from the ground," Morrison said. "On Streets, it couldn't nearly stretch itself to where I imagine it is most comfortable." Sometimes too much is just too damn much. **Jonny Lieberman**

SPECS	2021 MERCEDES-AMG GT BLACK SERIES
BASE PRICE/AS TESTED	$327,050/$335,595
POWER (SAE NET)	720 hp @ 6,700 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	590 lb-ft @ 2,000 rpm
ACCEL, 0–60 MPH	2.9 sec
QUARTER MILE	10.6 sec @ 136.1 mph
BRAKING, 60–0 MPH	93 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	1.17 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	21.9 sec @ 1.03 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB	15/20/17 mpg
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front-engine, RWD, 2-pass, 2-door coupe
ENGINE, TRANSMISSION	4.0L twin-turbo direct-injected DOHC 32-valve 90-degree V-8, 7-speed twin-clutch auto
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	3,655 lb (48/52%)
WHEELBASE	103.7 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	181.3 x 79.7 x 50.4 in
ON SALE	Now





2022 Porsche Cayenne Turbo GT





PROS Like a 911, but with a lift kit • A Lamborghini Urus for introverts • Exceptional handling and power
CONS Somewhat pointless in real life • Arguably not quite as fun as Lamborghini's Urus • It's not a 911 GT3

Porsche's GT division is responsible for building some wildly successful performance cars: the 911 Speedster, 718 Cayman GT4 RS, and 911 GT3. But the division has never built an SUV. Still, that didn't stop the Cayenne team from slapping the "GT" badge on the rump of its new fastback SUV. Thing is, the Cayenne Turbo GT might just be something the GT division wishes it could claim credit for.

We must believe the unmitigated critical and commercial success of the Lamborghini Urus (with which the Cayenne shares its platform, engine, and transmission, among other things) is in part what led to the creation of the Cayenne Turbo GT. Slotting in above the Cayenne Turbo S, the Turbo GT gets a reworked 4.0-liter twin-turbo V-8, a quicker-shifting eight-speed auto, a water-cooled AWD system to aid more aggressive torque vectoring, a retuned four-wheel steering system, stiffer air springs, and massive carbon-ceramic brakes. Rounding out the package are a carbon-fiber roof, active aero, and a titanium exhaust. The Cayenne Turbo GT makes 631 hp and 626 lb-ft of torque. That's 10 ponies and a single lb-ft shy of the Urus, but at $182,150 to start ($208,850 as tested), it's also about $40,000 less than the rival Lambo.



Although the Cayenne isn't a GT division product, don't tell it that. "Holy blazing smokes, the Cayenne Turbo GT is outrageous. *Outrageous*," executive editor Mac Morrison said. Senior features editor Jonny Lieberman added, "I believe Porsche has out-Urused the Urus." To their points, the Cayenne Turbo GT feels like a perfectly balanced plus-sized hot hatch. Its V-8 makes gobs of power, and the transmission backs up the engine's bark with quick, decisive shifts that always keep the engine in its powerband.

The steering is "Porsche perfect with amazing feedback," road test editor Chris Walton said, adding that it has an unflappable chassis. The end result is, you can drive this super SUV like a proper sports car, diving hard into corners and powering out early, relying on the torque-vectoring all-wheel-drive and four-wheel-steering systems to slingshot you out of bends.

The Turbo GT impressed us so much, it was the only SUV at our competition to receive the coveted finalist nod.

So where does the Urus for introverts fall down? There aren't many flaws here. Some found the ride a little firm for an SUV, and others thought it lacked personality when driven hard, which speaks against our Performance of Intended Function criterion.

After lapping the Cayenne Turbo GT at Streets of Willow, almost all judges agreed that although the Porsche is incredibly capable on the track, it's also out of place and, well, kind of pointless. "I think the only reason you track it is so you can embarrass 718 owners during lapping sessions," features editor Scott Evans said, "mostly because you're bored bringing the Porsches you already own and enjoy a bit of harmless trolling." Morrison agreed: "This is arguably a nonsensical vehicle in real life—who is really going to track this car? Isn't that why you buy a GT3? But it's so hilariously fun and capable, it'd be a shame if people don't do it."

It's not our PVOTY, but the Cayenne Turbo GT nevertheless remains one of the best-driving SUVs of all time and one the GT division should wish it had built.

Christian Seabaugh

SPECS	2022 PORSCHE CAYENNE COUPE TURBO GT
BASE PRICE/AS TESTED	$182,150/$208,850
POWER (SAE NET)	631 hp @ 6,000 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	626 lb-ft @ 2,300 rpm
ACCEL, 0-60 MPH	3.0 sec
QUARTER MILE	11.3 sec @ 121.0 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	105 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	1.07 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	23.2 sec @ 0.88 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB	14/19/16 mpg
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front-engine, AWD, 4-pass, 4-door SUV
ENGINE, TRANSMISSION	4.0L twin-turbo direct-injected DOHC 32-valve 90-degree V-8, 8-speed auto
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	4,967 lb (58/42%)
WHEELBASE	113.9 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	194.6 x 78.6 x 64.4 in
ON SALE	Now



Finalists

2022 Toyota GR86









PROS Improved refinement • More power • Slidey good times
CONS Still a bit loud and stiff • Brakes fade during track use • Oversteer not ideal for fast lap times

Look, there's no way we could host a Performance Vehicle of the Year event and not bring the affordable, rear-wheel-drive, stick-shift sports car along to the finalist round ... right? Well, yes and no. After a day at Hyundai's proving ground with both the new Toyota GR86 and its mechanical sibling, the Subaru BRZ, our finalist selection process devolved into a final-week-of-the-season morass like the one often faced by the College Football Playoff committee. Lots of de facto ties, followed by overly nuanced arguments for and against the Toyota and Subaru.

One key takeaway? The GR86 and BRZ aren't as alike as you'd expect. Each sport coupe wears slightly different styling, sure, but also unique tuning. Subaru and Toyota mount their fighters' rear anti-roll bars differently, with the GR86 locating the chassis-to-roll-bar connection on the subframe and the BRZ fitting its bar mounts directly to its body. Between that and minute differences in the springs, dampers, and bushings, the twins are more fraternal than identical.



Despite riding on the same Michelin Pilot Sport 4 summer tires, the BRZ and GR86 we had on hand for PVOTY evaluation exhibited divergent handling behaviors near and at their limits. The BRZ hangs in longer, clutching a neutral attitude by its planted rear end before letting its derrière go in spectacular fashion. In other words, it'll snap around suddenly and quickly when the rear tires' grip finally erodes; prepare for it, and it's easy to catch. Just be quick on that steering wheel and careful with the gas.

In the Toyota, you're ever aware of where the tail is on your internal friction circle. The chassis sends way more information about the rear tires' grip levels to your butt gyro all the way up until it's gone; unlike in the BRZ, passing through to the great drifty beyond is gleefully intuitive no matter your speed.

Feed in the GR86's quicker acceleration figures—5.8 seconds to 60 mph, compared to 5.9 for the BRZ—and the Subie's more rattly interior, and it makes sense to pick the Toyota.

More difficult was finding a spot for the GR86 among the finalists. It's a reflection of how compelling the vehicles we brought to PVOTY really are that it took horse-trading, shouting, and impassioned anxiety snacking of nearby junk food in the conference room at Hyundai's facility to elbow a lightweight, stick-shift, rear-drive sport coupe that starts for less than $30,000 past the finalist cut.

And what an improved low-buck sports car the GR86 is. Its much stiffer body shell and more refined suspension cushion or eliminate the tinny sensations and crashing over broken pavement that afflicted the old Toyota 86. The new 2.4-liter flat-four engine spits out an extra 23 hp and 29 lb-ft of torque compared to last year's 2.0-liter, and it eradicates that old engine's midrange torque dip and sounds more impressive and delivers better response.

Having kept its playful chassis and feelsome shifter while adding nicer interior materials and tech, the GR86 is a shopping list must-add for any enthusiast on a budget. Just be sure to set aside some cash for better brakes—we experienced fade after a few laps on the Streets of Willow racetrack.

Alexander Stoklosa

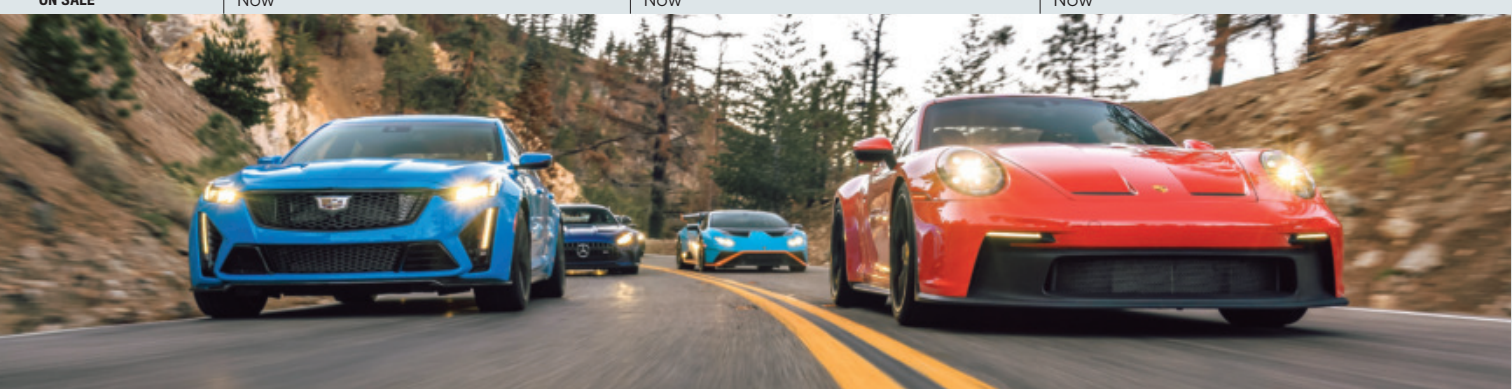
SPECS	2022 TOYOTA GR86
BASE PRICE/AS TESTED	$28,725/$31,750
POWER (SAE NET)	228 hp @ 7,000 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	184 lb-ft @ 3,700 rpm
ACCEL, 0-60 MPH	5.8 sec
QUARTER MILE	14.3 sec @ 98.7 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	108 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	0.98 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	24.7 sec @ 0.76 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB	20/27/22 mpg
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front-engine, RWD, 4-pass, 2-door coupe
ENGINE, TRANSMISSION	2.4L port- and direct-injected DOHC 16-valve flat-4, 6-speed manual
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	2,817 lb (56/44%)
WHEELBASE	101.4 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	167.9 x 69.9 x 51.6 in
ON SALE	Now



FINALISTS SPECS	2022 BMW M3 Competition xDrive	2022 Cadillac CT4-V Blackwing	2022 Cadillac CT5-V Blackwing
DRIVETRAIN LAYOUT	Front-engine, AWD	Front-engine, RWD	Front-engine, RWD
ENGINE TYPE	Twin-turbo direct-injected DOHC 24-valve I-6, alum block/head	Twin-turbo direct-injected DOHC 24-valve 60-degree V-6, alum block/heads	Supercharged direct-injected OHV 16-valve 90-degree V-8, alum block/heads
DISPLACEMENT	2,993cc/182.6 cu in	3,564cc/217.5 cu in	6,162cc/376.0 cu in
COMPRESSION RATIO	9.3:1	10.2:1	10.0:1
POWER (SAE NET)	503 hp @ 6,250 rpm	472 hp @ 5,750 rpm	668 hp @ 6,500 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	479 lb-ft @ 2,750 rpm	445 lb-ft @ 3,500 rpm	659 lb-ft @ 3,600 rpm
REDLINE	7,200 rpm	6,500 rpm	6,500 rpm
WEIGHT TO POWER	7.8 lb/hp	8.2 lb/hp	6.1 lb/hp
TRANSMISSION	8-speed automatic	10-speed automatic	6-speed manual
AXLE/FINAL DRIVE RATIO	3.15:1/2.02:1	2.85:1/1.82:1	3.73:1/2.01:1
SUSPENSION, FRONT; REAR	Struts, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar; multilink, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar	Struts, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar; multilink, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar	Struts, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar; multilink, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar
STEERING RATIO	15.0:1	11.6-15.5:1	11.6-15.5:1
TURNS LOCK TO LOCK	2.0	2.2	2.2
BRAKES, F; R	15.7-in vented, drilled carbon-ceramic disc; 15.0-in vented, drilled carbon-ceramic disc	15.0-in vented disc; 13.4-in vented disc	15.7-in vented, drilled carbon-ceramic disc; 14.7-in vented, drilled carbon-ceramic disc
WHEELS, F; R	9.5 x 19-in; 10.5 x 20-in forged aluminum	9.0 x 18-in; 9.5 x 18-in cast aluminum	10.0 x 19-in; 11.0 x 19-in forged aluminum
TIRES, F; R	275/35R19 100Y; 285/30R20 99Y Michelin Pilot Sport 4S	255/35R18 94Y; 275/35R18 99Y Michelin Pilot Sport 4S	275/35R19 100Y; 305/30R19 102Y Michelin Pilot Sport 4S
DIMENSIONS			
WHEELBASE	112.5 in	109.3 in	116.0 in
TRACK, F/R	63.7/63.2 in	60.5/60.5 in	63.3/62.3 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	189.1 x 74.3 x 56.4 in	187.6 x 71.4 x 56.0 in	194.9 x 74.1 x 56.5 in
TURNING CIRCLE	41.4 ft	38.8 ft	42.6 ft
CURB WEIGHT (DIST F/R)	3,899 lb (54/46%)	3,888 lb (53/47%)	4,067 lb (54/46%)
SEATING CAPACITY	5	5	5
HEADROOM, F/R	40.6/37.8 in	38.3/36.5 in	39.0/36.6 in
LEGROOM, F/R	41.6/35.6 in	42.4/33.4 in	42.4/37.0 in
SHOULDER ROOM, F/R	56.0/54.6 in	55.2/53.9 in	56.7/55.7 in
CARGO VOLUME	13.0 cu ft	10.7 cu ft	11.9 cu ft
TEST DATA			
ACCELERATION TO MPH			
0-30	1.0 sec	1.5 sec	1.6 sec
0-40	1.7	2.2	2.2
0-50	2.3	3.0	2.8
0-60	3.0	4.0	3.6
0-70	3.8	5.1	4.3
0-80	4.8	6.4	5.2
0-90	5.9	7.7	6.4
0-100	7.2	9.4	7.5
PASSING, 45-65 MPH	1.5	1.9	1.5
QUARTER MILE	11.1 sec @ 124.7 mph	12.4 sec @ 114.0 mph	11.5 sec @ 127.5 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	105 ft	106 ft	102 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	1.03 g (avg)	1.05 g (avg)	1.04 g (avg)
***MT* FIGURE EIGHT**	23.3 sec @ 0.89 g (avg)	23.8 sec @ 0.84 g (avg)	23.4 sec @ 0.89 g (avg)
TOP-GEAR REVS @ 60 MPH	1,500 rpm	1,500 rpm	1,700 rpm
CONSUMER INFO			
BASE PRICE	$77,895	$59,900	$84,990
PRICE AS TESTED	$108,545	$80,235	$112,545
AIRBAGS	8: Dual front, front side, f/r curtain, front knee	8: Dual front, front side, f/r curtain, front knee	8: Dual front, front side, f/r curtain, front knee
BASIC WARRANTY	4 years/50,000 miles	4 years/50,000 miles	4 years/50,000 miles
POWERTRAIN WARRANTY	4 years/50,000 miles	6 years/70,000 miles	6 years/70,000 miles
ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE	4 years/Unlimited miles	6 years/70,000 miles	6 years/70,000 miles
FUEL CAPACITY	15.6 gal	17.4 gal	17.4 gal
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB ECON	16/22/18 mpg	16/24/19 mpg	13/21/15 mpg
EPA RANGE (COMB)	281 miles	331 miles	261 miles
RECOMMENDED FUEL	Unleaded premium	Unleaded premium	Unleaded premium
ON SALE	Now	Now	Now



FINALISTS SPECS	2021 Hyundai Veloster N	2021 Lamborghini Huracán STO	2021 Mercedes-AMG GT Black Series
DRIVETRAIN LAYOUT	Front-engine, FWD	Mid-engine, RWD	Front-engine, RWD
ENGINE TYPE	Turbo direct-injected DOHC 16-valve I-4, alum block/head	Port- and direct-injected DOHC 40-valve 90-degree V-10, alum block/heads	Twin-turbo direct-injected DOHC 32-valve 90-degree V-8, alum block/heads
DISPLACEMENT	1,998cc/121.9 cu in	5,204cc/317.6 cu in	3,982cc/243.0 cu in
COMPRESSION RATIO	9.5:1	12.7:1	8.6:1
POWER (SAE NET)	275 hp @ 6,000 rpm	630 hp @ 8,000 rpm	720 hp @ 6,700 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	260 lb-ft @ 1,450 rpm	417 lb-ft @ 6,500 rpm	590 lb-ft @ 2,000 rpm
REDLINE	6,750 rpm	8,500 rpm	7,000 rpm
WEIGHT TO POWER	11.5 lb/hp	5.4 lb/hp	5.1 lb/hp
TRANSMISSION	8-speed twin-clutch auto	7-speed twin-clutch auto	7-speed twin-clutch auto
AXLE/FINAL DRIVE RATIO	3.80:1 (1, 2, 5, 6, R), 2.71:1 (3, 4, 7, 8)/1.89:1	2.65:1/2.23:1	3.88:1/2.68:1
SUSPENSION, FRONT; REAR	Struts, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar; multilink, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar	Control arms, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar; control arms, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar	Control arms, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar; control arms, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar
STEERING RATIO	12.3:1	13.4:1	10.5-14.3:1
TURNS LOCK TO LOCK	2.1	2.3	2.1
BRAKES, F; R	13.6-in vented disc; 12.4-in vented disc	15.4-in vented, drilled carbon-ceramic disc; 14.2-in vented, drilled carbon-ceramic disc	15.8-in vented, drilled carbon-ceramic disc; 14.2-in vented, drilled carbon-ceramic disc
WHEELS, F; R	8.0 x 19-in cast aluminum	8.5 x 20-in; 11.0 x 20-in forged aluminum	10.0 x 19-in; 12.0 x 20-in, forged aluminum
TIRES, F; R	235/35R19 91Y Pirelli P Zero HN	245/30R20 90Y; 305/30R20 103Y Bridgestone Potenza Race L	285/35R19 103Y; 335/30R20 108Y Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 R M01A
DIMENSIONS			
WHEELBASE	104.3 in	103.1 in	103.7 in
TRACK, F/R	61.9/61.6 in	66.5/64.8 in	66.7/66.7 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	167.9 x 71.3 x 54.9 in	179.0 x 76.6 x 48.0 in	181.3 x 79.7 x 50.4 in
TURNING CIRCLE	38.1 ft	37.7 ft	36.0 ft (est)
CURB WEIGHT (DIST F/R)	3,159 lb (65/35%)	3,390 lb (42/58%)	3,655 lb (48/52%)
SEATING CAPACITY	4	2	2
HEADROOM, F/R	31.8/35.9 in	37.0/– in	39.5/– in
LEGROOM, F/R	42.6/34.1 in	40.9/– in	43.5/– in
SHOULDER ROOM, F/R	56.0/54.3 in	57.9/– in	58.4/– in
CARGO VOLUME	19.9 cu ft (44.5 cu ft w/ seats folded)	1.3 cu ft	10.1 cu ft
TEST DATA			
ACCELERATION TO MPH			
0-30	2.1 sec	1.2 sec	1.2 sec
0-40	2.9	1.7	1.7
0-50	3.9	2.2	2.3
0-60	5.1	2.8	2.9
0-70	6.6	3.5	3.6
0-80	8.3	4.3	4.3
0-90	10.3	5.1	5.1
0-100	12.9	6.1	6.0
PASSING, 45-65 MPH	2.4	1.2	1.2
QUARTER MILE	13.7 sec @ 102.9 mph	10.7 sec @ 132.3 mph	10.6 sec @ 136.1 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	114 ft	95 ft	93 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	0.97 g (avg)	1.16 g (avg)	1.17 g (avg)
***MT* FIGURE EIGHT**	24.7 sec @ 0.76 g (avg)	22.3 sec @ 0.99 g (avg)	21.9 sec @ 1.03 g (avg)
TOP-GEAR REVS @ 60 MPH	1,500 rpm	2,400 rpm	2,000 rpm
CONSUMER INFO			
BASE PRICE	$33,525	$333,633	$327,050
PRICE AS TESTED	$35,025	$442,033	$335,595
AIRBAGS	6: Dual front, front side, f/r curtain	6: Dual front, front side, front knee	8: Dual front, front side, head, knee
BASIC WARRANTY	5 years/60,000 miles	3 years/Unlimited miles	4 years/50,000 miles
POWERTRAIN WARRANTY	10 years/100,000 miles	3 years/Unlimited miles	4 years/50,000 miles
ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE	5 years/Unlimited miles	3 years/Unlimited miles	4 years/50,000 miles
FUEL CAPACITY	13.2 gal	21.1 gal	19.8 gal
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB ECON	20/27/22 mpg	13/18/15 mpg	15/20/17 mpg
EPA RANGE (COMB)	290 miles	317 miles	337 miles
RECOMMENDED FUEL	Unleaded premium	Unleaded premium	Unleaded premium
ON SALE	Now	Now	Now



	2022 Porsche Cayenne Turbo GT	2022 Toyota GR86
	Front-engine, AWD	Front-engine, RWD
	Twin-turbo direct-injected DOHC 32-valve 90-degree V-8, alum block/heads	Port- and direct-injected DOHC 16-valve flat-4, alum block/heads
	3,996cc/243.9 cu in	2,387cc/145.7 cu in
	9.7:1	12.5:1
	631 hp @ 6,000 rpm	228 hp @ 7,000 rpm
	626 lb-ft @ 2,300 rpm	184 lb-ft @ 3,700 rpm
	6,750 rpm	7,600 rpm
	7.9 lb/hp	12.4 lb/hp
	8-speed automatic	6-speed manual
	3.09:1 (front), 2.95:1 (rear)/1.97:1	4.10:1/3.14:1
	Multilink, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar; multilink, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar	Struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar; multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar
	12.2:1	13.5:1
	2.2	2.5
	17.3-in vented, drilled carbon-ceramic disc; 16.1-in vented, drilled carbon-ceramic disc	11.6-in vented disc; 11.4-in vented disc
	10.5 x 22-in; 11.5 x 22-in forged aluminum	7.5 x 18-in cast aluminum
	285/35R22 106Y; 315/30R22 107Y Pirelli P Zero Corsa N0	215/40R18 85Y Michelin Pilot Sport 4
	113.9 in	101.4 in
	66.4/66.3 in	59.8/61.0 in
	194.6 x 78.6 x 64.4 in	167.9 x 69.9 x 51.6 in
	37.7 ft	35.4 ft
	4,967 lb (58/42%)	2,817 lb (56/44%)
	4	4
	38.1/38.3 in	37.0/33.5 in
	41.1/40.0 in	41.5/29.9 in
	59.1/56.4 in	53.6/51.7 in
	19.4 cu ft (51.7 cu ft w/ seats folded)	6.3 cu ft
	1.1 sec	2.1 sec
	1.6	3.2
	2.3	4.4
	3.0	5.8
	3.9	7.5
	4.9	9.4
	6.1	11.9
	7.5	–
	1.5	2.9
	11.3 sec @ 121.0 mph	14.3 sec @ 98.7 mph
	105 ft	108 ft
	1.07 g (avg)	0.98 g (avg)
	23.2 sec @ 0.88 g (avg)	24.7 sec @ 0.76 g (avg)
	1,300 rpm	2,600 rpm
	$182,150	$28,725
	$208,850	$31,750
	10: Dual front, f/r side, f/r curtain, front knee	7: Dual front, front side, f/r curtain, driver knee
	4 years/50,000 miles	3 years/36,000 miles
	4 years/50,000 miles	5 years/60,000 miles
	4 years/50,000 miles	4 years/50,000 miles
	23.7 gal	13.2 gal
	14/19/16 mpg	20/27/22 mpg
	450 miles	290 miles
	Unleaded premium	Unleaded premium
	Now	Now















2022 MOTORTREND PERFORMANCE VEHICLE OF THE YEAR®

WORDS JONNY LIEBERMAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BRANDON LIM

PORSCHE 911 GT3



DOMINATION IS IN ITS BLOOD

To the surprise of the few and the horror of those trying to purchase one for sticker price, the 2022 Porsche 911 GT3 is *MotorTrend*'s 2022 Performance Vehicle of the Year. The competition was fierce for this year's inaugural award, but in the end most of the judges voted for the GT3. The two who didn't score it first had Porsche's latest and greatest in second place—quite a close second place, at that. And yes, the word "greatest" is apropos here. That is, until the next GT3 iteration drops—which should be any time now. Why so dominant, why so loved, why so great? Several reasons, but first let's go backward.



Small, chunky steering wheel; ergonomically efficient primary and secondary controls; clear primary instruments; and a stick shift—the 911 GT3 interior is minimalism done right.

We considered ourselves fortunate to attend the launch of the old 991.2 911 GT3 in Spain back in 2017, not only because that GT3 generation (the new GT3 is the 992.1) was magnificent but also because attendees got to chase rally legend Walter Röhrl around a racetrack for five laps. Life was good. I remember writing this next part before I drove the 991.2 version: "[The 991.1] GT3 marked the first time in my career I had nothing negative to say about a vehicle." Followed by, "I don't have the foggiest idea how the wizards of [Weissach] can make the GT3 any better than it already is. Although I suspect Porsche will tell me once I get to Spain."

In other words, it was impossible to conceive how Porsche could even *kind of* improve upon the already spectacular 991.1 GT3. But it sure did. Fast-forward to hours before the 2022 PVOTY competition began, and our judging panel collectively thought the same thing. Guess what? The unfathomable has been achieved. Again.

A sampling of initial comments from *meine Kollegen* once they spun a turn behind the Porsche's wheel: "This is pure driving pleasure," features editor Scott Evans said. "Honestly, it's the only car that made me lose my breath." Features editor Christian Seabaugh added, "My gosh, this is such a good car." Deputy editor Alexander Stoklosa recounted, "I took this on two laps of the winding road circuit at the Hyundai Proving Ground, and by the time I exited, I was sweaty and feeling absolutely jacked, wanting more." Good thing for him we then went to the racetrack, no? Director of editorial operations Mike Floyd said, "Holy hell, this thing is amazing. Wow."

Head of editorial Ed Loh went a bit cerebral trying to explain what's so great about the GT3: "It makes you feel sharper and more in tune with everything—from the soles of your feet to the pads of your fingertips, all the way to the base of your skull and the lizard part of your brain that ensures you don't die in your sleep." Executive editor Mac Morrison was more succinct, simply offering, "Sheeeeeezus H. Porsche. Maaaaannnnnnn."

Yeah, friends, this car is absurdly great. It serves up unbelievable levels of performance paired with unbelievable levels of grip, head-ringing aural thrills thanks to a 502-hp humdinger of a 4.0-liter naturally aspirated flat-six that revs all the way to 9,000 rpm, and the best manual transmission in automotive history. Did we mention the gobs and bushels



and duffel bags full of both horsepower and revs? Perhaps the 992 GT3 is not as laser-guided or quick as the other two big wingers present (the Lamborghini Huracán STO and the Mercedes-AMG GT Black Series), a whole host of McLarens, or even Porsche's own upcoming GT3 RS. However, this car boasts a solidity, an everyday ease of use, and the resulting desire to just drive it more and more that separates the GT3 from the rest of the frontrunners for this year's trophy.

But what about the criteria? Oh yes, we are fully aware that transitioning away from our old Best Driver's Car competition to one of our signature







Of The Year formats means any winner is subjected to our six key criteria. In case this is your first time, they are: advancement in design, engineering excellence, performance of intended function, safety, value, and efficiency. Even when keeping every one of these in mind, the Porsche excels. Hell, forget excels; the GT3 dominates.

Advancement in Design

This one is as simple as ... just look at it. At first glance and across but two dimensions, you may not "get" the nostrils on the GT3's hood. We assure you the two speed holes (they're actually part of the car's aerodynamics, similar to openings on the Lamborghini Aventador SVJ) grow on you after repeated viewings. Back to the launch of the old 991.2 GT3, I'll never forget something Porsche GT-division boss Andy Preuninger said during the press conference: "The GT3 has to be the most attractive 911." Targa fans might disagree, but the newest GT3 looks fabulous, even in muted orange sherbet (actual color name: Lava Orange). And that wing! A piece of functional sculpture. Anyone opting for the wingless GT3 Touring version is nuts. Ahem.

We also loved the interior's design, specifically the well-executed sparseness. Countless gallons of ink have been spilled, both actual and virtual, rightly chastising Tesla for that brand's signature near lack of an interior, but the GT3 isn't that. No, this car's guts represent minimalism done right. "I love how simple it is inside—just get in and go," Stoklosa said. "There's a button for ESC, one for the shocks, and that's pretty much it. No fiddling, all fun." Yes, you get right down to business inside the GT3, the business of *woohoo*!

Loh was particularly impressed. "The control layout is awesome," he said. "It's not as spaceship-weirdo-wild-looking as the Huracán STO. It's also not as plasticky as the AMG GT. I'm Goldilocks, and this supercar is *juuuust riiiiight*. Love the seats, love this vehicle. Awesome."

Not only is the layout awesome, but the controls themselves also inspire awe. We've only partially told you about the fabulous gear lever. One reason it's so spot on is that the transmission's synchros are made from brass, not plastic; when you shift gears, you're actually pushing metal through metal. So cool. But just holding the stick feels wicked. The clutch is perfectly weighted, too. Porsche truly nailed the small stuff. "It's a little thing, but I love the steering wheel," Seabaugh said. "It's a dinky little 7/8ths-sized thing that just feels perfect in your hands." Amen.







Engineering Excellence

The criteria's lines are easy to blur. For instance, the stick shift bleeds over from Advancement of Design into Engineering Excellence. So be it. As associate road test editor Erick Ayapana asked, "Why can't all shifters be like this?" It's no shock to say the latest from Porsche's freaking racing division—after all, that's what the GT crew does—is excellently engineered. But, brothers, sisters, this is one of those hard-to-overstate situations.

As an example, let's look at the car's grip. We were impressed. "The amount of mechanical grip, aided at times by the aero, is stupefying," Morrison said. "Like, it's just criminal, and I use that word as a positive. You should not be able to drive the front end into corners as hard as you can, and you should not be able to go back to power so hard and early and easily as the new GT3 allows you to."

Want to talk brakes? Evans does. "The brake feel is the real accomplishment here, and that's saying something," he said. "You can feel exactly how hard the pads are biting at every moment, intuit exactly how much braking you're using and how much you have left in reserve." Road test editor Chris Walton added, "The brakes are nuclear."

Grip and brakes, that's just tires, right? Well, partially, sure, but we promise you that while slapping the GT3's sticky Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 R N0s on your car will improve its performance, the GT3 is better engineered. It pulled 1.19 g (average) on our skidpad, tying it with the 2019 911 GT2 RS for the highest average number we've ever recorded. Its figure-eight time was just 0.2 second off the 720-hp AMG GT Black Series, a car that makes 218 extra horsepower. And the GT3 beat the incredible 630-hp Lambo STO here by 0.2. If that's not engineering excellence, what is?

Performance of Intended Function

The 911 GT3 crushes this category. This is the part where we break down both what a GT3 is and what makes a Performance Vehicle of the Year. The GT3 is the sportier, racier, harder-core, no-compromise 911. And the 911 is a hell of a sports car to start with. From that not so humble origin point, the wizards and witches of Flacht work their magic, transforming a superlative sports car into an everyday supercar. Yes, supercar.

The ride isn't soft, but you can live with this car. "Old dudes like me might have some trouble with ingress and egress," Floyd said, "but once you get yourself snug in the seat, you can easily drive the GT3 all day in slow traffic or on a long highway stretch. The clutch pedal action doesn't punish your left leg, and loping around town is a breeze."

You simply can't say the same about either the STO or the Black Series. Everyday? Maybe every track day, and even that's a stretch. For instance, assuming your head isn't too big, you might be able to fit your helmet—just one—into the Lambo's frunk. Emphasis on "might." The Black Series, while deeply impressive, is really just a bridge too far for a street car. The GT3? Let's just say we understand why people are paying $50,000 more than sticker for a street car that can also rip up a racetrack.

"It's just a joy to drive hard on a circuit, which is what the GT3 is absolutely made to do," Floyd said. "It's so obvious how long Porsche has been developing this car and the 911 in general. There's a next-level feel you just don't get with the

THE GT3 IS THE SPORTIER, RACIER, HARDER-CORE, NO-COMPROMISES 911. AND THE 911 IS A HELL OF A CAR TO START WITH.



Huracán or GT Black." In other words, it's a special 911 doing precisely what its maker intended. Talk about performance of intended function, indeed. That alone makes it a great candidate for Performance Vehicle of the Year.

Value

Income inequality must be causing mass psychosis for us to say a car with a base price of $164,150 and an as-tested kitty of $195,850 is a great value, but humor us for a moment. When you consider the two cars in this test that most closely compete with the Porsche—the $355,595 AMG and the $442,033 Lamborghini—the GT3 looks like a steal. Toss on that $50,000 ADM (adjusted dealer markup), and the Porsche is still a steal.

Efficiency

We cannot, however, with a straight face tell you a car that carries an EPA rating of 16 mpg combined is efficient. But this is Performance Vehicle of the Year; none of the competitors was designed with astounding efficiency in mind. Additionally, the GT3's fuel economy is in line with the other contenders in its performance plane. Hot tip: Opt for the extended-range gas tank, and you'll feel as if you're getting great mileage.

Safety

Cars like the 911 never get crash ratings, never mind the GT3. That's just how it is. So we can't tell you about its passive safety worthiness. However, a car that grips and stops the way the GT3 does is inherently safe in the hands of a skilled driver. Oh, and we seem to remember it has adaptive cruise control, too.



How well does the GT3 handle? Its 22.1-second lap of our figure eight is the third-quickest time we've ever recorded.

POWERTRAIN/CHASSIS	2022 Porsche 911 GT3
DRIVETRAIN LAYOUT	Rear-engine, RWD
ENGINE TYPE	Direct-injected DOHC 24-valve flat-6, alum block/heads
DISPLACEMENT	3,996cc/243.9 cu in
COMPRESSION RATIO	13.3:1
POWER (SAE NET)	502 hp @ 8,400 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	346 lb-ft @ 6,100 rpm
REDLINE	9,000 rpm
WEIGHT TO POWER	6.4 lb/hp
TRANSMISSION	6-speed manual
AXLE/FINAL DRIVE RATIO	3.09:1/2.72:1
SUSPENSION, FRONT; REAR	Control arms, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar; multilink, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar
STEERING RATIO	11.2-14.2:1
TURNS LOCK TO LOCK	2.4
BRAKES, F; R	16.1-in vented, drilled carbon-ceramic disc; 15.4-in vented, drilled carbon-ceramic disc
WHEELS, F; R	9.5 x 20-in; 12.0 x 21-in forged aluminum
TIRES, F; R	255/35R20 97Y; 315/30R21 105Y Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 R N0
DIMENSIONS	
WHEELBASE	96.7
TRACK, F/R	63.0/61.1 in
LENGTH X WIDTH X HEIGHT	180.0 x 72.9 x 50.4 in
TURNING CIRCLE	34.1 ft
CURB WEIGHT (DIST F/R)	3,188 lb (40/60%)
SEATING CAPACITY	2
HEADROOM, F/R	37.9/– in
LEGROOM, F/R	42.2/– in
SHOULDER ROOM, F/R	52.6/– in
CARGO VOLUME	4.6 cu ft
TEST DATA	
ACCELERATION TO MPH	
0-30	1.5 sec
0-40	2.0
0-50	2.8
0-60	3.4
0-70	4.2
0-80	5.2
0-90	6.2
0-100	7.3
0-100-0	10.8
PASSING, 45-65 MPH	1.5
QUARTER MILE	11.4 sec @ 126.0 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	93 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	1.19 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	22.1 sec @ 0.95 g (avg)
TOP-GEAR REVS @ 60 MPH	2,500 rpm
CONSUMER INFO	
BASE PRICE	$164,150
PRICE AS TESTED	$195,850
AIRBAGS	8: Dual front, front side, front curtain, front knee
BASIC WARRANTY	4 years/50,000 miles
POWERTRAIN WARRANTY	4 years/50,000 miles
ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE	4 years/50,000 miles
FUEL CAPACITY	23.7 gal
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB ECON	14/18/16 mpg
EPA RANGE (COMB)	379 miles
RECOMMENDED FUEL	Unleaded premium
ON SALE	Now



Dominant Winner Wins

There's so much more to say. We haven't mentioned the Davante Adams–like way the GT3 changes direction. Or the switch to a double control arm suspension up front. Or how for the first time in 911 history, you don't need to trail-brake your way into every corner, because (surprise!) the front suddenly has copious grip. The front end is like a race car. There's also the part about how with only 2 additional hp, the 992.1 GT3 is nearly *18 seconds* quicker around the Nürburgring Nordschleife than the 991.2 GT3 it replaces. If only we could show you all the notes from all the judges, including our dedicated test team, just so you could see how consistently overwhelming the superlatives are. It's without end.

Anything we don't like? Evans and Loh thought the ride quality was lacking, to the point Evans recommends never putting the dampers into Sport. Not everyone agreed with him. That's about it for the negatives. Looking over my own notes, one line caught my eye: "If the GT3 isn't second place, it's first." As much as I and the rest of the judges loved the Porsche, the Lamborghini STO was also exceptional. But by a vote of five judges to two, the GT3 claimed the crown.

Epilogue

After the vote, and because I was the judge writing this winner story, I took the new Porsche 911 GT3 home for about a week. A friend of mine owns a 991.2 GT3 Touring; we decided to drive them back to back. I figured this new GT3 would be slightly better, but I quickly learned it's about 70 percent better. The 2022 model made the old one feel like a couch. I'm not kidding. And remember, this was a couch that at one point in time we said was the best-driving car in the world.

If that's not enough, I'll leave you with something 20-year veteran auto scribe and motorsports/track-driving aficionado Morrison wrote in his notes. "This might sound nuts," he said, "but I thought hard about it for several days after our PVOTY activities concluded: I'm not sure I've ever driven a better car. In my entire career."

Nicely played, Porsche, and congrats on winning the first *MotorTrend* Performance Vehicle of the Year award. Now comes the hard part: Do it again next year. As I wrote before about the 991.2 GT3, "How do you take something with no apparent flaws, no visible weaknesses, and improve upon it anyway?" None of us knows the answer, but we're sure Preuninger and the gang have some ideas. We can't wait to test them out. ■







Updates on our long-term fleet

MT GARAGE

PHOTOGRAPHY *MT* STAFF



UPDATE: 2021 Mercedes-Benz E 450



Service Life 4 mo/4,639 miles
Average Fuel Econ 20.8 mpg

"How well do 24.6 inches of screen space work? It didn't take us long to find out." Zach Gale

Unresolved problems None
Maintenance cost $0 **Normal wear** $0
Base price $63,050 **As tested** $72,770
EPA City/Hwy/Comb fuel econ 23/30/26 mpg

Although the futuristic Hyperscreen in the EQS sedan is Mercedes' infotainment headliner right now, the E-Class appears to hold its own—at least upon first glance. As increasingly large screen sizes proliferate across the market, the two 12.3-inch screens of our Mercedes E 450 aren't as noteworthy as they once were.

Use the digital instrument cluster and infotainment display as much as we have, and you'll see the technology is very much a mixed bag. There's more to this picture than simply 24.6 inches of screen behind a smooth glass panel.

When the E-Class earned its title as the 2021 *MotorTrend* Car of the Year, nearly every one of our judges criticized MBUX. A couple months behind the wheel has helped me explore the layers of usefulness baked into the brand's infotainment tech, but it remains a point of frustration.

Take the track-forward command as one example. Moving past a song you're not in a mood to hear should be easy, but it's too complex in the Mercedes. There are plenty of ways to get the job done, but none works as well as a direct button on the steering wheel (which the Mercedes lacks) or a one-touch button somewhere on the dash (nope).

Mercedes also goes its own way when it comes to Apple CarPlay and Android Auto. Once your phone is connected, you'll immediately notice the nearly 2 inches of mostly blank space on either side. We wish Mercedes would either offer a full-screen CarPlay display option or do what Toyota, Acura, and others do with their large screens: have the phone mirroring feature take up two-thirds of the screen with a selection of other info displays on the rest. This has been a recurring complaint with Mercedes infotainment systems for years, and although it appears to be fixed in new vehicles, including the S-Class, it's too bad other models haven't received an upgrade. This detail alone makes the car feel older than it should.

The situation is better with the digital instrument cluster, but even there, the car has a few areas that need improvement. Like when it is using its "reserve" fuel capacity, the last thing you want is for the estimated distance-to-empty indicator to just disappear. That doesn't encourage the driver to get fuel faster; it merely adds anxiety.

Infotainment is the great equalizer among automakers. And despite this unit's customizability, a few things could make the experience much better. On the upside, if you're still smitten by the E-Class—and we do recommend the E 450 model if that's within your budget—by the time you're ready for a new model, hopefully Mercedes will have made improvements to the updated system we're seeing in the C- and S-Class sedans.

That's not to say the setup is without merits. Although infotainment isn't this car's strongest suit, there are positive aspects besides how much better it looks than whatever you trade in. For example, after thousands of miles behind the wheel, I can change volume with a simple swipe of my right thumb on the steering wheel controls. And even though the updated integrated navigation system doesn't always have





the updated points of interest a phone-based system might, voice-commanding a destination is easy. The maps get two over-the-air updates a year, so this won't likely be a big issue for those who actually use the integrated system.

The augmented reality navigation feature is cool, too, though it would be helpful if it could show in the instrument cluster, as well. Augmented reality navigation shows graphical arrows and information on a camera view of your actual surroundings. So if you have a right turn coming up but you're not sure if it's the street immediately ahead or the one shortly after, augmented reality navigation can help.

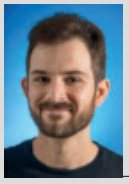
Mercedes' future interior design is even more screen-heavy, but we're thankful to have the up/down toggles for temperature. They're not as good as knobs, but those physical controls are still easier to manipulate, especially when you don't want to interrupt your music with a voice command.

My early verdict? The infotainment tech in the 2021 E-Class has room for improvement—and no, that doesn't automatically translate to, "It needs more screens!" The displays look good, and there are bright spots, but Mercedes should address a couple issues.

Spending more time with our one-year test car has taught me two main lessons about its tech: one, that it's not as bad as I remember it from recent E-Class models I've driven; and two, that it's still not a class leader. Good thing the rest of the car is so good.

VERDICT HYUNDAI SONATA | KIA SELTOS | UPDATE KIA SORENTO | UPDATE LAND ROVER DEFENDER 110 | UPDATE MERCEDES-BENZ E450 | MERCEDES-BENZ GLE450 | UPDATE NISSAN ROGUE
NISSAN SENTRA | RAM 1500 TRX | RAM 2500 HD UPDATE | TOYOTA GR SUPRA | TOYOTA MIRAI | TOYOTA VENZA | VOLVO XC40

2021 Kia Sorento



Service Life 4 mo/7,386 miles
Average Fuel Econ 21.8 mpg

"Our Sorento hits the test track, and we find fun and frustration in a matter of seconds." **Alex Leanse**

Unresolved problems None **Maintenance cost** $0
Normal wear $0 **Base price** $40,965
As tested $42,190 **EPA City/Hwy/Comb fuel econ** 21/28/24 mpg

Although the outgoing Sorento offered a V-6, the latest generation can be had with a four-cylinder or not at all. Our long-term Sorento SX is equipped with the range-topping 2.5-liter turbocharged I-4. Making 281 hp, it's slightly less powerful than the old 290-hp 3.3-liter V-6. But with 311 lb-ft, the boosted four-pot is far torquier than the atmospheric six's 252 lb-ft. Backed by all-wheel drive and an eight-speed dual-clutch automatic, our three-row feels quick. A trip to the track produced numbers to back that up.

Acceleration to 60 mph took 6.4 seconds, and the quarter mile passed in 14.8 seconds at 96.5 mph. Those figures are well ahead of the last V-6 Sorento we tested, a 2019 model that hit 60 in 7.6 seconds and the quarter in 15.8 seconds at 89.8 mph. Associate road test editor Erick Ayapana said he went with a "slap and go" launch strategy: Flooring the throttle from a standstill worked best, as he found the "powertrain does not allow pedal overlap or any kind of funny business." Surprisingly, the quickest result came in Comfort mode, not Sport.

On the figure-eight handling course, our Sorento posted a 26.6-second time at 0.66 g average, marginal improvements over the older model. Road test editor Chris Walton appreciated its "remarkably crisp" turn-in and "rather talkative" steering. "Overall," Walton said, "the redesigned Sorento is much sportier than it needs to be. That's a good lap time."



As always, the numbers don't tell the whole story. Speedy as this crossover is, how that speed comes on isn't very refined. Much of that has to do with the dual-clutch transmission, which remains a point of frustration. At low speeds it can stutter, especially when creeping forward. Once underway, shifts are generally smooth, but the ratios' spacing can drop the engine just outside of the turbo's assistance, resulting in waves of boost that last only a moment before the next shift.



2021 Land Rover Defender 110





Service Life 2 mo/2,527 miles
Average Fuel Econ 14.6 mpg

"Who needs a pickup when you have a six-seat Defender?"
Christian Seabaugh

Unresolved problems None
Maintenance cost $0 **Normal wear** $0
Base price $64,050 **As tested** $74,960
EPA City/Hwy/Comb fuel econ 17/22/19 mpg

There's usually a feeling-out period with a new long-termer. But our Land Rover Defender 110 P400 SE was thrown right into the deep end, eating up the miles on-road and off. An unexpected surprise so far is just how practical the Defender has proven itself to be.

I know, it's no surprise a full-size SUV is spacious. But I spent a year wedging things around the rollcage of a Jeep Wrangler, so the complete lack of compromise our Defender brings to the table is refreshing. What's surprising is how well it handles the type of stuff most people purchase a pickup to haul.

It all starts in the cargo area. First, open the massive swing gate (which can hold itself open in any position). Remove the fabric cargo cover and stash it under the floor, and you'll find the trunk is coated in durable hard plastic. This plastic looks cheap, but it's both hard-wearing and easy to clean. So far it has held up well to hauling cinder blocks, wood, dirt, and dogs.

Things get even better when you drop the 60/40 split-folding rear seat. The rear seat backs are covered in the same plastic as the cargo area, and with the rear seats down and our Defender's optional front bench seat up, the Land Rover rivals a regular-cab pickup in practicality. The total length from the back of the front seats to the swing gate is 6 feet, but thanks to the enclosed area, the Defender 110 has 78.8 cubic feet of cargo volume.

"Aha!" you're thinking, "But how're you gonna haul sheets of plywood or something like a mattress?" Easy. The roof. The Expedition roof rack on the Defender 110 is rated to handle a dynamic load of 370 pounds, which is about 8 sheets of 4-by-8-foot plywood. Although the optional roof ladder (sitting in a box in my garage waiting to be installed) would make loading the roof rack easier, the air suspension did a lot of the lifting for me. From the front seats, drop the Defender down into its Access height setting, then walk around to the back and pop open the swing gate. You can lower the suspension even more, further reducing the height.



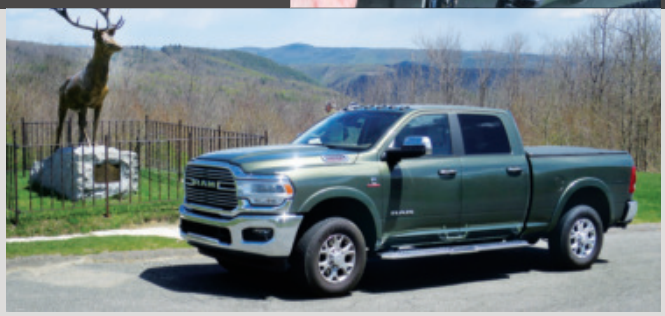
The only pinch point is ratchet-strapping the load down; without tie-downs, you need to use soft loops to secure your cargo, which sometimes requires a limberness I don't possess.

So far I haven't found a job our Defender 110 can't handle, but with a busy few months ahead, I'll report back if I find otherwise.

We spend about $9.50 per gallon on DEF. Truck stops offer it in pumps for $2.99.



2020 Ram 2500





Service Life 11 mo/25,652 miles
Average Fuel Econ 17.5 mpg

"With our Ram's stint with us coming to a close, we found time to conduct a couple scientific tests." **Frank Markus**

Unresolved problems None **Maintenance cost** $491
(1-oil filter, inspection, fuel filter, 2-tire rotation, cabin air filter)
Normal wear $0 **Base price** $54,045 **As tested** $76,130
EPA City/Hwy/Comb fuel econ Not rated

Embarrassing admission with valid explanation: I checked the oil in our long-term Ram 2500 Cummins for the first time at 23,700 miles. Here's why, per the owner's manual: "Check the engine oil level at least 30 minutes after a fully warmed engine is shut off." It seems this big, complicated engine has myriad nooks and crannies that hang on to the 0W40 oil. My driveway and street are both on an incline, so that's not a good place to check the oil 30 minutes after arriving home, and I don't ever sit for 30 minutes parked on a level fuel station forecourt waiting to check the oil.

The morning we departed on a big trip to Maine, I checked the oil level parked on my driveway after an overnight cold soak. It looked 3/4 full. The next morning, on a level parking spot, it looked full. At the next gas stop I checked it after just having switched off the engine. Sure enough, it looked low again. But an after-lunch check, also on flat ground, showed it full. Impressive, given all the high-speed running it's had in the 9,000 miles since its first oil change.

Another scientific test conducted on this trip was to see how it behaves as the diesel exhaust fluid (DEF) tank nears empty. When the needle hit the red zone on the dedicated analog DEF gauge, the yellow low-DEF light came on, along with a warning that in 250 miles, speed would be limited to 5 mph. I cleared the message, but it returned every 50 miles for a while, then every 25. The needle seemed to plunge much faster in the red zone than it does in the top three-quarters of its arc. I filled it when the needle hit E, with the remaining DEF range showing 66 miles.

I had another light towing task this month—a wood chipper. After a couple turns, the truck had identified it as a 20-foot trailer and adjusted the blind-spot detection accordingly. But this episode included a minor disaster. The area adjacent to the hitch receiver is too tight to allow a typical safety clip to click into position on the retainer pin that holds the ball-drop. It stayed attached for the smooth-road ride home from the rental agency but didn't survive the bouncy ride up my cabin's quarter-mile gravel driveway. This safety clip fell off, the retainer pin worked loose, and the receiver pulled out. It turns out those safety chains will indeed drag a trailer 50 feet! I was fortunate enough to find the pin and retainer, hammering the retainer into place, bending it slightly in the too-small trailer hitch area, and returning the trailer. Why the 2500 hitch is too tight for a pin that fits fine on a Ram 1500 is one of truckdom's great mysteries.

As our time with the beloved Ram winds down, we're brainstorming a few final "heavy lifting" tasks to assign this gentle giant.



2021 Nissan Rogue



Service Life
3 mo/1,084 miles
Average Fuel Econ
27.8 mpg

"Our long-term Rogue falters at the test track." **Kelly Lin**

Unresolved problems None
Maintenance cost $0 **Normal wear** $0
Base price $30,090 **As tested** $33,530
EPA City/Hwy/Comb econ 25/32/28 mpg



We're still getting to know our Nissan Rogue, its hidden gems, and its quirks. A recent trip to the test track revealed more of its personality. Turns out the compact SUV is not exactly roguish in that environment.

In our acceleration tests, we hit 60 mph in a leisurely 8.4 seconds. This time makes the Rogue quite a bit slower than the 2021 Honda CR-V AWD Touring, which clocked 7.8 seconds, and our previous long-term Toyota RAV4 XLE AWD, which made the run in 8 seconds flat. The Rogue's acceleration is on par with the base-engine Ford Escape. In fact, the Rogue makes the same 181 hp as the Escape's turbo-three engine. But the Rogue uses a 2.5-liter I-4 that pumps out 181 lb-ft of torque.

In the braking test from 60 to 0 mph, the Rogue exhibited some notable front dive, but it came to a complete stop in a reasonable 120 feet, right between the CR-V (119) and RAV4 (121).

A glimmer of athleticism shone through in the figure eight, proving power isn't the only thing that counts. Road test editor Chris Walton praised the Rogue's relatively quick and well-weighted steering and effective braking around the bends. "If it weren't for the lazy transmission, this would be a very sporty little SUV," he said.

Our real-world experience mimics what we encountered on the track. In everyday driving, it struggles getting up to speed on the highway. This is worth considering if you're deciding between a 2021 and 2022 Rogue. For 2022, the Rogue switches to a 1.5-liter turbo-three. Despite dropping a cylinder, the new engine makes an improved 201 hp and 225 lb-ft of torque.

Other impressions? Although it's not as quiet as I'm used to, I've been enjoying the spacious cabin. But we'll have much more to share in the coming months.

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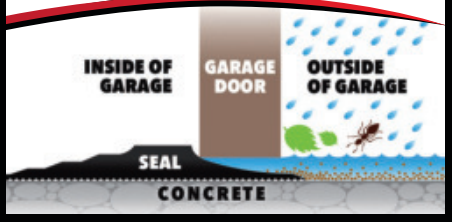


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Verdict: 2020 Hyundai Sonata



"After a full year with the Sonata, we've found at least one reason to buy it over a Honda Accord." **Kelly Lin**

Base Price $34,475 **As Tested** $34,630

SPECS **Options** Carpeted floormats ($155)
Problem Areas None **Maintenance Cost** $0 (oil change, inspection)
Normal Wear $0
3-Year Residual Value* $27,700 (80%)
Recalls None

*IntelliChoice data; assumes 42,000 miles at the end of 3 years



Service Life 12 mo/11,734 mi **Avg Fuel Econ** 24.4 mpg

When we first took stock of our 2020 Hyundai Sonata Limited, we were impressed by its slick screens, comfortable leather seats, and stylish exterior. A year later, does the Sonata continue to charm, or has it lost its luster?

The midsize sedan rolled into our garage wearing a striking sapphire blue paint job and all the trimmings of the top-tier Limited model. At $34,630, our test car looks almost like a luxury sedan. Its plush caramel leather seats held up well over a year of passengers shuffling in and out, loading and unloading tons of baby gear, car-seat installations, and baby spit-ups. The leather didn't pucker over time like it did on one of my previous long-term vehicles, a rather luxurious Volvo XC60.

The Sonata's interior earned high praise for its uncluttered, elegant design. I enjoyed the easy-to-use 10.3-inch touchscreen, though I didn't fully appreciate how crisp it was until I downgraded to a duller 8.0-inch screen in my latest test car (the Nissan Rogue on page 79). The Sonata's infotainment screen complements the 12.3-inch digital instrument cluster, and a sharp Bose sound system sweetens the deal.

Passengers enjoyed the panoramic sunroof, but Highway Driving Assist is my favorite feature. A semi-autonomous system that combines adaptive cruise control and lane centering tech, this feature makes highway commuting less stressful. Although it has a tendency to steer the Sonata to the left side of the lane within the lane markings, it works better





The Sonata's leather seats stood up well to a year of abuse.



The Hyundai is no speed demon; it has just the right amount of juice to merge and pass other cars on the freeway.



than some other systems we've tested. The 360-degree camera setup is another winner, providing a clear view on all sides of the car and making it easy to park this long sedan. We started the year wondering how useful all the fancy tech really was, and we can now say we're glad we had it. The only real tech hiccup we encountered was with the keyless entry. It often wouldn't register when I touched the door and had the key in my pocket, forcing me to dig out the fob and press a button.

I had no illusions about the Sonata's performance going into the year. Our car features the upgraded engine option: a 1.6-liter turbocharged four-cylinder that makes 180 hp and 195 lb-ft of torque. As I quickly learned, it has just enough power for merging and passing other cars on the highway. Given how well it handles, I didn't mind its lack of power. What became more and more bothersome over time was how the power is delivered. There's noticeable lag off the line when you jam the accelerator, so making quick maneuvers in traffic can get a little tricky.

No maintenance problems plagued our Sonata, but the car visited the dealership twice for routine servicing. Our first service was free, but Hyundai charged $92.01 for our second. These costs will look quite different for typical retail customers of newer Sonatas, however. For vehicles sold on or after February 1, 2020, Hyundai offers complimentary maintenance for three years or 36,000 miles, whichever comes first.

Subaru also offers free maintenance, which is why our long-term 2017 Subaru Legacy cost $0 over three service visits and 20,460 miles. Complimentary maintenance hasn't been the norm among other competitors in our long-term fleet, though. We spent $178.96 for two service visits on our 2014 Mazda 6, which logged 24,316 miles, and $204.92 on two services for our 2013 Nissan Altima, which finished its run at 21,774. Surprisingly, our long-term 2013 Honda Accord cost more than all of these sedans, racking up a bill of $209.42 for two service visits over the course of 22,856 miles.

As for a longer-term cost outlook, our colleagues at IntelliChoice have some insights. Although we enjoy all the fancy features that come with the top Limited trim, it might not be the right model if you're looking to maximize value over five years. The Limited trim earned a value rating of Average, when taking into account depreciation, insurance, fuel costs, state fees, financing, maintenance, and repairs. Of all Sonata trims, the base SE gets a Good value rating.

The Honda Accord remains our top pick for a midsize sedan because of its superior driving dynamics and its spacious, well-packaged interior. That said, our time spent with the Sonata confirms it's a solid pick.

Among its plain-looking competitors, it stands out with its sharp design, and its tech-forward cabin continues to delight over time, speaking to its strong feature-per-dollar value. Its playful handling never gets old on a twisty road, and for the practical-minded, free maintenance and a generous warranty make a strong case for the Sonata.



2020 Hyundai Sonata Limited 1.6T

DRIVETRAIN LAYOUT	Front-engine, FWD
ENGINE TYPE	Turbocharged I-4, alum block/head
VALVETRAIN	DOHC, 4 valves/cyl
DISPLACEMENT	97.5 cu in/1,598cc
COMPRESSION RATIO	10.5:1
POWER (SAE NET)	180 hp @ 5,500 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	195 lb-ft @ 1,500 rpm
REDLINE	6,500 rpm
WEIGHT TO POWER	18.4 lb/hp
TRANSMISSION	8-speed automatic
AXLE/FINAL DRIVE RATIO	3.37:1/2.14:1
SUSPENSION, FRONT; REAR	Struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar; multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar
STEERING RATIO	13.3:1
TURNS LOCK TO LOCK	2.6
BRAKES, F; R	12.8-in vented disc; 11.8-in disc
WHEELS	7.5 x 18-in cast aluminum
TIRES	235/45R18 94V Michelin Primacy Tour A/S (M+S)
DIMENSIONS	
WHEELBASE	111.8 in
TRACK, F/R	63.1/63.3 in
LENGTH X WIDTH X HEIGHT	192.9 x 73.2 x 56.9 in
TURNING CIRCLE	35.9 ft
CURB WEIGHT	3,316 lb
WEIGHT DIST, F/R	60/40%
SEATING CAPACITY	5
HEADROOM, F/R	38.4/37.4 in
LEGROOM, F/R	46.1/34.8 in
SHOULDER ROOM, F/R	57.9/56.1 in
CARGO VOLUME	16.0 cu ft
TEST DATA	
ACCELERATION TO MPH	
0-30	2.7 sec
0-40	3.8
0-50	5.5
0-60	7.4
0-70	9.5
0-80	12.3
0-90	15.6
PASSING, 45-65 MPH	3.8
QUARTER MILE	15.7 sec @ 90.1 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	115 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	0.89 g (avg)
***MT* FIGURE EIGHT**	26.6 sec @ 0.66 g (avg)
TOP-GEAR REVS @ 60 MPH	1,800 rpm
CONSUMER INFO	
BASE PRICE	$34,475
PRICE AS TESTED	$34,630
STABILITY/TRACTION CONTROL	Yes/Yes
AIRBAGS	9: Dual front, f/r side, f/r curtain, driver knee
BASIC WARRANTY	5 years/60,000 miles
POWERTRAIN WARRANTY	10 years/100,000 miles
ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE	5 years/Unlimited miles
FUEL CAPACITY	15.9 gal
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB ECON	27/37/30 mpg
EPA RANGE (COMB)	477 miles
RECOMMENDED FUEL	Unleaded regular

Angus MacKenzie

The Big Picture



Automobiles don't kill. Drivers do.

The notion that human error is responsible for 94 percent of road crashes is "a deadly myth," David Zipper says. Writing in *The Atlantic*, Zipper, a visiting fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School's Taubman Center for State and Local Government, contends that blaming crashes on drivers' bad decisions implies nobody else could have prevented them.

"That enables car companies to deflect attention from their decisions to add heft and height to the SUVs and trucks that make up an ever larger portion of vehicle sales, and it allows traffic engineers to escape scrutiny for dangerous street designs," Zipper writes.

Zipper's article appeared after the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reported last October that more than 20,000 Americans died in road crashes in the first half of 2021, an 18.4 percent increase compared to 2020 and the largest number of fatalities in that time period since 2006.

"This is a crisis," said U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg, who announced the U.S. Department of Transportation plans to produce its first ever National Roadway Safety Strategy in response to the numbers. "We cannot and should not accept these fatalities as simply a part of everyday life in America."

Buttigieg is correct. The death rate on our roads, which is markedly higher than that in other highly motorized developed nations like Australia, the U.K., Germany, and Sweden, is unacceptable. But NHTSA's own research into the 2021 spike suggests Zipper's so-called deadly myth is in fact America's deadly reality.

Driver error *is* the overwhelming reason motor vehicles crash and kill.

NHTSA noted in its analysis that the pandemic lockdowns and work-from-home directives significantly changed driving patterns and behaviors in 2020. "Of the drivers who remained on the roads, some engaged in riskier behavior, including speeding, failure to wear seat belts, and driving under the influence of alcohol or other drugs," NHTSA reported in its October 2021 Traffic Safety Facts research report. "Speeding and not using seat belts remained elevated in 2021 compared to pre-pandemic times. Changes in alcohol and other types of drug use [were] also documented."

Automobiles didn't fundamentally change in the first half of the year. Road systems didn't change, either. Driver behavior did, and that's why fatal crashes spiked.

Driving a modern car, truck, or SUV, most of which are equipped with automatic transmissions, power steering, antilock brakes, and stability control systems, isn't difficult. Most of us find it way easier than playing the piano or juggling chain saws. And that's precisely the problem. These days we can get where we want to go with an astonishingly low level of attention to the driving process. And every time we arrive at our destination in one piece, we subconsciously reinforce this behavior.

Too many people die on our roads because too many drivers simply aren't paying attention to what they're doing and what's happening around them.

> No matter how hard automakers work on safety, humans will always be the weak link.

Zendrive, a transportation data analytics firm, says that in nearly 17 percent of all collisions it analyzed in 2020, a phone was in use in one of the vehicles 5 seconds before impact. The Federal Highway Administration says more than 50 percent of the combined total of injury and fatal crashes occur at or near intersections, the majority of which have roadways controlled by at least one traffic signal or one stop sign. In almost 17 percent of fatal crashes involving large trucks, NHTSA says those killed were in the vehicles that rear-ended the trucks.

No matter how hard automakers work on active and passive crash safety systems, no matter how well our roads are designed for safety, humans—disinterested or distracted or drunk or drugged behind the wheel—will always be the weak link in the system. Because to err is human.

"Drive to the conditions, and don't drive faster than you can see," my dad said when he taught me to drive in our old Land Rover many years ago. "And don't assume anyone else on the road knows what they're doing."

That's still sound advice.

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2022 EV6 GT-Line AWD shown. Some features may vary. Expected early 2022.